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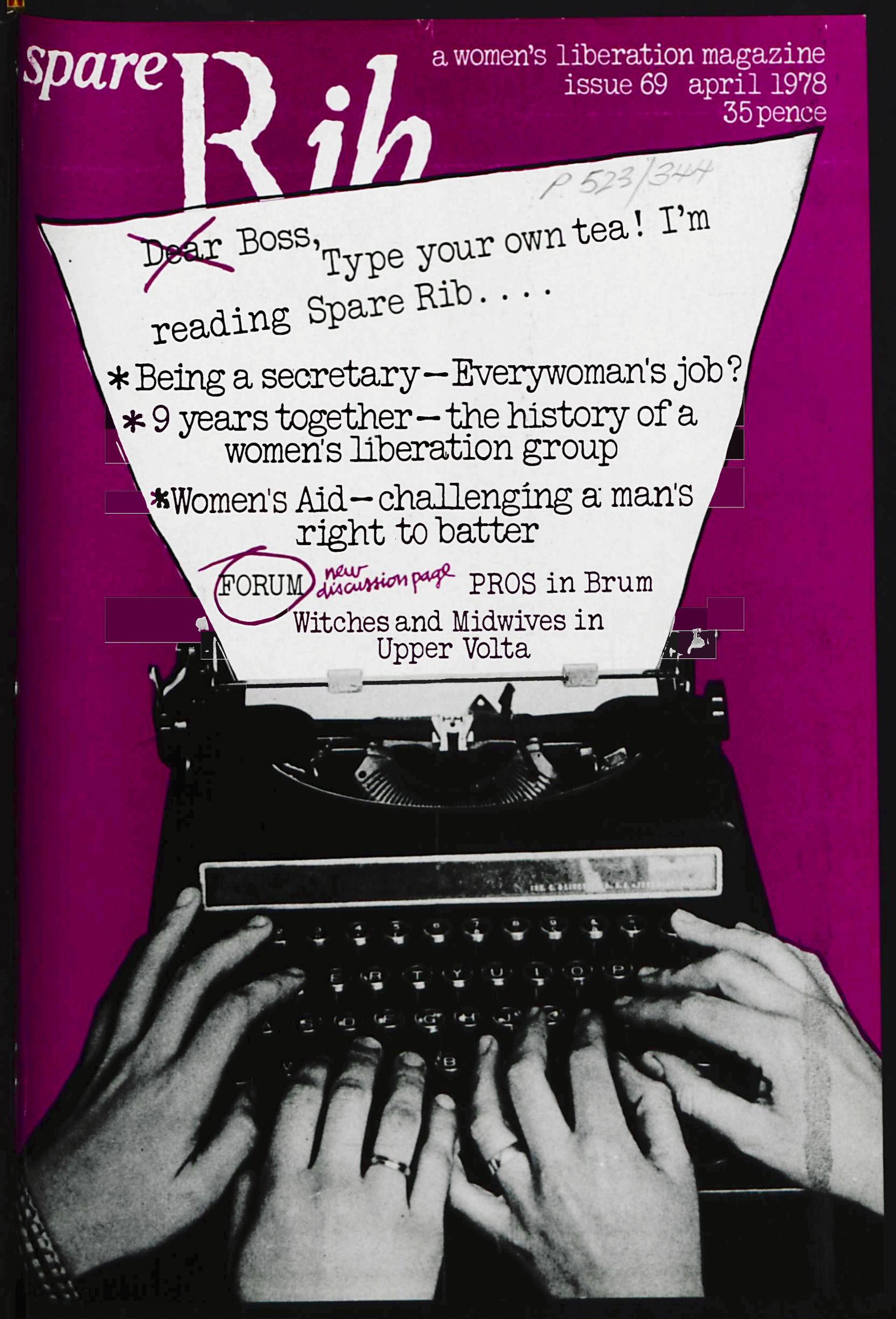
~~Dear~~ Boss, Type your own tea! I'm reading Spare Rib....

* Being a secretary – Everywoman's job?
* 9 years together – the history of a women's liberation group
* Women's Aid – challenging a man's right to batter

FORUM new discussion page

PROS in Brum

Witches and Midwives in Upper Volta



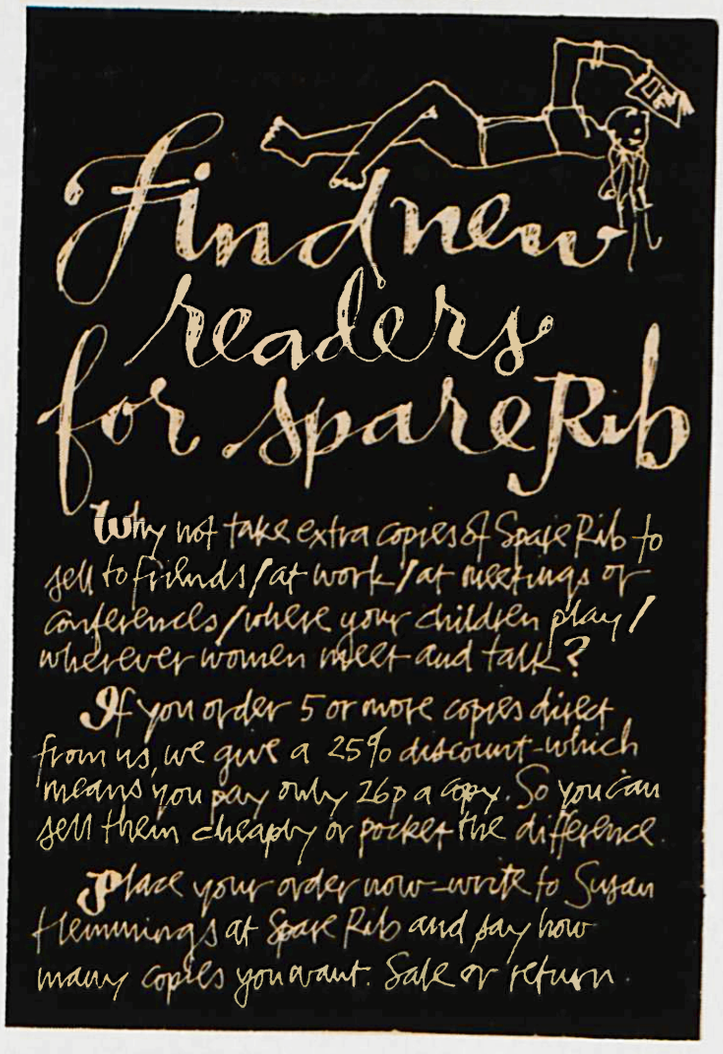
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Photograph by Valerie Wilmer

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The Extended Family

* Dear *Spare Rib*,

I am interested and admiring of the bold experiments in shared child-care sensitively described by Marsha Rowe in *SR* 66, 67 and 68. Born of necessity and protest, and in hope, may I suggest that they should not be over-critical of their setbacks and disappointments. Several of the difficulties observed happen in many nuclear families. I feel it would be helpful to recognise these so that the success or not of the experiments may be fairly judged. Here are some examples:

1 A child's jealousy of any other love relationship of the parent, whether with a brother or sister or with an adult.

2 The dominance of one adult over the other in the handling and discipline of the child.

3 The female (not male as observed in Leeds) who disregards housework in favour of time spent with the child—or for any other reason!

My experience in teaching Asian children in an English school has shown me that there are many advantages in the wider family group some of which emerged in Marsha Rowe's articles. In addition the severe illness or even death of a parent would seem to be less traumatic than in a nuclear family. Also the daily living with brothers and 'brother-cousins' seems to be helpful in many practical ways from baby-sitting to Parent Evenings when the parent representative is the one who speaks English best. The children themselves develop a caring and supportive role to each other and seem to enjoy the wider companionship.

Has anyone any predictions of what the outlook and mode of living of these children will be in the year 2000 AD?

Yours—in love,
Margaret Widgery.



Haunting Housework

* Dear *Spare Rib*,

I just had to write and say how much I enjoyed Nadia Wheatley's 'Unwritten Story' (*SR* 67). As a Film-maker (capital F) and a woman (small w) I find parallel difficulties to the author's. How do you distinguish when it's more important to carry on reading/researching/editing as opposed to cooking/buying food/thinking about either of these? And the problem is insidious; one just cannot 'forget oneself' in work without the silly mundane practical thoughts creeping in . . . And I don't even have children. More stories please. Congratulations to Nadia Wheatley for synthesising so well what many of us feel.

Love and sisterhood,
Sara Bright,
Bogota, Colombia.

Sweeping Changes

Dear *Spare Rib*,

Although *Unwritten Story* is a cleverly written tale, I found it astonishingly shortsighted and wrong-headed.

I am a student living in a two person flat with another girl. I dust and sweep my room about once a month, and clean the kitchen about once a week. We rarely cook, surviving very happily most of the time on bread, cheese and muesli. I have lived in a mixed communal house where the same standards applied—no-one dreamt of doing housework if other more important activities were at stake. In no way do domestic tasks interfere with my interests or with my lifestyle as a whole. If I want to read, write, act, direct, go to the theatre or the pub I do so, sweeping doesn't come into it.

This is not to claim that housework need never be done, nor to advocate living in squalor, but it's just to plead for a healthier, less hysterical attitude to domestic tasks. Until women stop bolstering up the importance of household chores, seeing them as barriers to their freedom, instead of realising that they really don't matter, they are still acting out the traditional stereotyped roles of clucking hen and nagging housewife. To break the shackles of domestic slavery, why don't women just throw down their brooms?

Yours in sisterhood,
Caroline Thompson.

Chosen Martyrdom?

Dear *Spare Rib*,

This letter was instigated by the series 'Changing Childcare' by Marsha Rowe and 'Unwritten Story' by Nadia Wheatley (*SR* 67). Both reminded me how much I would like to contact other women living in mixed collective houses; I wish to exchange our experiences of job sharing.

Never having lived alone, I must have been through every permutation of rota systems/collective non-responsibilities/childcare/shit work/caring/sharing etc. I have ended up—to my own self amazement and political confusion—doing most of the food preparation, storekeeping, and house management for three adults and three children. I chose the job after doing everything else to avoid it, but at least I don't feel trapped because I chose it—or did I?

If anyone is personally involved in this dilemma why don't you send me a synopsis of the problem and its solving; I will amalgamate any stories into a newsletter and we can then be in contact. Anyway, send an SAE with your comments and we'll try.

Anji Eded,
Launceston,
Cornwall.



** indicates that letters have been cut for reasons of space*

Power without Responsibility

In SR 65 there was an article objecting to the National Council for One Parent Families' suggestion that single or married fathers should have equal control with the mother over the child, even against the mother's wishes. In SR 67 Lesley Saunders wrote that such criticisms were sexist. The controversy continues . . .

Dear *Spare Rib*,

While I agree with Lesley Saunders (*SR* 67) that *Spare Rib* shows something of an anti-male bias, I think she rather missed the point of the two articles she was complaining about. These did not suggest that the mother should bear the greatest responsibility for the children, but that, as the mother is the one who carries all the difficulties of producing the child from conception to birth, she should have greater rights over the child. Surely this should be so whether the mother is married or not.

Though I think Lesley is right in saying that the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children should be abolished, giving the unmarried father equal rights over the child could create the situation where a woman who has had a child after a one-night stand—or even after being raped—and who has been left to bring it up on her own could have that child taken from her by a man she hardly knows, after she had gone through all the hard work of bringing it up.

What is really wrong with the new proposals is that, predictably, it gives the father more rights but not more responsibilities. He can still make the woman pregnant and then leave, if that's what he wants to do; the law doesn't compel him to take responsibility—all it does is give him the option of having equal rights over the child. And no doubt, if the law is implemented, the onus will be on her to prove that he isn't the father, rather than on him to prove that he is.

The implications for women who want to bring up children on their own and for lesbians who arrange affairs of convenience for this reason, are particularly serious.

With love,
S Miller,
London.

Men and Women Against Sociology!

Dear *Spare Rib*,

Some people think that Women's Liberation stops at Hadrian's wall I would like to assure all our sisterhood over the border that although we might be far from London's bright lights, demonstrations and rallies, we are flying the flag of equality just as high.

As a student of sociology in my penultimate year at Aberdeen University, I have consistently sought a feminist perspective in all aspects of my course. Last year the Sociology department actually offered students a 6-week option entitled 'The Sociology of Women'. It was of course taught by a male sociologist—there being only one female lecturer in the entire department, she being primarily concerned with social anthropology.

Sociology has long been criticised by feminists. As a discipline committed ideally, to "the pursuit of truth, the objective study of human relationships"; the sociologist strives to maintain an objective position in the study of society.

Yet the male sociologist is a member of a racist, sexist society and thus his analysis is unconsciously biased by a set of implicit social stereotypes. For example, economic and descriptive source material on black ghetto culture is plentiful, but its usefulness is severely restricted due to the fact that black women have been victimised by scholarly neglect and racist assumptions. Gerda Lerner has noted that the roles, history and contributions of men and women are on closer examination so greatly separate as to constitute separate cultures. Thus it is necessary for all male sociologists to recognise that there is a female aspect to all sociology, that women's contributions to the building and shaping for society were different from that of men. In the past this has meant that the female point of view has lain dormant, insignificant in the eyes of the male sociologist. Sexual equality must surely mean new insights into sociological analyses and the review of many implicitly male-biased cultural studies.

Yours in feminism,
Catherine M McMenemy,
Aberdeen,
Scotland.

PS I'd love to hear how other feminist University students have coped with their courses.

Pleased by Rock Follies

* Dear *Spare Rib*,

The review of Rock Follies in *SR* 66 does not seem to have really dealt with the issues this series raises. I would like to offer a more positive reading in what I consider to be three main areas:

Pleasure

The whole question of pleasure presents itself rather urgently with Rock Follies in that it clearly is intended to be enjoyable, and a lot of people did enjoy it, including even as the reviewers admit, those who think they should not ('I know it's sexist, but sorry, I like it'). It seems to me that what we should be trying to do with television programmes is to understand how they work and especially how they work as entertainment. We need to establish what the sources of pleasure are, and then why it is that some of the pleasure is also bound up with embarrassment, guilt, or even dis-pleasure.

Rock Follies provides several likely pleasure points: its similarity to Hollywood musicals (Howard Schumann acknolwedges this debt); the songs (sufficiently appealing for one, OK, to become a hit); the story of three girls trying to make it in the pop music world (the world of money, power, excitement, scandal, glamour, stars); humour (a character like Sandra); style (lots of energy, movement, light and colour).

Narrative

Rock Follies is fiction. It does not offer a picture of the real world, nor does it pretend to. It tells a simple story about three girls. It poses a question at the beginning –are they going to make it or not– and at the end gives us an answer– yes, but only . . . Everything else that happens is determined by the drive of that story to its resolution. What this means is that characters and situations are invented. They are sufficiently like real people and real events to make them believable and yet they remain types and representations. They are written into the television text in a kind of shorthand which the audience can and must transcribe.

There is no way in which television fiction of this kind can present real people, or the complexities of the pop music industry; nor in fact could a documentary, though it might set out to do so. What a good story has to do, whether it is a novel, or television, is to involve us in the fiction so that we both think and feel that fiction, and also ourselves in relation to it. Rock Follies does have this effect; it invites an *active* involvement from its audience (shifts, adjustments, contradictions, uncertainties).

Feminism

Rock Follies is not feminist, nor about feminism. If it was sold as such then we have to blame the PR media and if we believed them we have to blame our own gullibility. There is no feminist television and there cannot be within the present system. We have to do what we can to change that system. But something we also have to do is to identify, along with the anti-feminist material, programmes that contain elements of change. And Rock Follies seems to have some. The first positive thing is that its main characters are women, not just in terms of screen time, but as protagonists in the story, as initiators, activists, decision-makers. Other positive features follow from this: the three girls are not married, nor do they see 'marriage' as the solution to their problems or the source of happiness; they are financially independent of men, their relationships with each other are the most interesting thing in the programme, and the most moving.

Stephanie McKnight,
London.

Man and What

* Dear *Spare Rib*,

I've noticed that they still have the words 'I now pronounce you man and wife' in the marriage ceremony, still indicating that man is master and woman is slave. I think little things like this will go on hindering the cause for Women's Freedom.

Yours in sisterhood,
C Hall,
London NW8.

Unanswered Questions

Dear *Spare Rib*,

We welcome the inauguration of a *Spare Rib* forum on the question of whether feminists should join left parties. And we realise that any group in the unfortuante position of leading off the debate will probably draw a lot of fire. Nevertheless in a spirit of socialist sisterhood, we'd like to offer a few criticisms:

1 Much of Jenny's and Elizabeth's contributions concerned, quite reasonably, the obvious first question: Why join a revolutionary party? Neither, however, defined the term 'revolutionary party'; its historical background (are Lenin's ideas relevant to Britain today?); precisely how such organisations differ from the Women's Movement (surely it too, though based on federated small groups, can 'orchestrate political activity'); or what contradictions were tolerable between their affiliation to the WLM and their party.

2 Although both contributors outlined their reasons for joining the Communist Party, these weren't specific enough to show how the Party differs from other left groups. Several other groups (Big Flame and the IMG, for example) support autonomous feminist organisation. The Socialist Workers' Party, for example, strives to be 'broadly-based' in the sense of actively recruiting industrial workers as well as community, student and white-collar militants. Several parties (including Labour) fight for 'a left majority in Parliament', although their reasons for doing so vary significantly. On the other hand, some of these parties might disagree with the specialised and variable level of participation which Jenny describes in the Sheffield CP.

3 Finally, we feel it's essential to discuss the CP's stance (and that of any other contributors to this Forum) on a number of issues which were not covered in this article. For example: Should British troops be withdrawn from Northern Ireland? Should rank and file groups organise in and across trade unions? Should import controls be instituted to protect Britain's economy? What alliances are possible between the left and the Labour Party? On such questions the Communist Party differs significantly with other left groups, both analytically and programatically. Surely an examination of these issues is also essential to understanding the politics of a given party and their relation to our own, as socialists *and* as feminists.

Lindsay Cooper and Mandy Merck,
non-aligned socialist feminists,
London.

Unreasonably suspicious?

Dear *Spare Rib*,

In connection with Elizabeth's article on why she joined the Communist Party. Firstly, the article does not explain why she chose the CP rather than any of the other socialist organisations such as SWP (Socialist Workers Party) or IMG (International Marxist Group), since she appears mainly to have been seeking a structured socialist organisation.

Secondly, and most importantly, I deeply resent the implication that many feminists reject the CP because of some kind of hysterical Macarthyite prejudice. We have had opportunities to see what kind of society highly structured communism leads to–the state capitalism and repression in Russia springs easily to mind. If you believe, as I do, that the way you organise for revolution deeply affects the society you then create, you can only reject any hierarchical and dogmatic approach, such power structures are self-perpetuating and ultimately rob individuals of the power to control their own lives. Is it unreasonably suspicious to think that it is only becase of the potential of the autonomous women's liberation movement which we have built that the CP now allows its members to embrace feminism?

There are many reasons why some of us reject the Communist Party, to imply that this rejection is based largely in irrational fear and that our criticisms are 'red-baiting' rather than discussing the real questions involved is not only insulting and devious, it also stereotypes women as not having the capacity to make rational political analysis and decisions.

Lyn Alderson
London

Correction

There were misprints in the letter from Sheila Rowbotham *SR* 67. It should have read 'I believe we are now able to explore the gap between feminism–the conscious search for an alternative–with femininity–the experience of being a woman in the world as it is.' And later in the letter, 'This assumes people don't experience contradictory wants–especially people attacking the mystique of Motherhood and seeking new ways of having children.'

Apology

In our November issue we published, without permission, a cartoon which appeared in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* on September 17. It was accompanied by our comment: 'How the *Birmingham Evening Mail* reported the week of action'.

The cartoon had no relevance to the women's week of action which culminated in a Birmingham march seven days after it appeared.

We apologise to the publishers of the *Evening Mail* for the infringement of their copyright and for the unfounded imputation of irresponsible reporting.

SEND LETTERS TO 27 CLERKENWELL CLOSE, LONDON EC1.

are you a typewriter?

You pick up the job ad section of the paper and it's got practically nothing but secretarial and other office vacancies; you walk along the streets and in every shopping centre job ads smile out of the windows at you . . . but they're all for secretaries and other office workers. For six years there's been a silent crisis in office staff with men complaining "It's impossible to find a good secretary", while women keep shopping around, trying to find a tolerable job, and black women get almost nowhere at all. What's wrong with secretarial work, and the typing, filing and running around that goes with it? Has it got anything to do with the fact the job has no future; the fact that the business world is so ridden with sexism that women remain 'girls' and the secretary/boss relationship is like that between a husband and servile wife? Yet if women don't like it, why don't they change it? After all, one third of all employed women work in offices, and the 1971 census showed 800,000 secretaries. Focusing on secretaries, *Clare Cherrington* explores what is happening in offices and what can be done to change it.

Everywoman's job

What is this job that's many teenage girls' dream? For although there are other types of secretary than the 'personal'—shared secretaries, pooled typists—most girls at secretarial school hope to be a private secretary, the pinnacle of most women's rise in the office world.

It's a combination of a variety of jobs: the skilled work of shorthand, audio or copy typing, administrative routines and tasks and on-the-spot errands for the boss. What these jobs have in common is that they are all servicing the boss. Put another way, he does all the 'difficult', 'responsible', interesting things like meeting people, making decisions, getting projects going or pursuing a specialist activity, like law or medicine. She does the follow-up work: typing letters, filing records, making appointments, etc. So there's a horizontal division: he takes the top half, she the bottom. Hers is a dead-end job, characteristic of the business world where men get trained to advance in the executive or specialist level and women may get as far as the nebulous 'personal assistant', but rarely further.

They were never meant to. This division of labour has existed since women entered the office world—barely 70 odd years ago! Shorthand in the nineteenth century was a male concern: Dickens at 18, taking down parliamentary debates for the press, remarked that he was probably the fastest shorthand writer in the world. This was before the typewriter, when clerks were less than 1% of paid workers—which they were still in 1851. Discounting those relatives of the family who became clerks to learn the business the hard way, it seems likely that whether the clerks got promotion or stayed put depended on class. But with the entrance of women into the office, an absolute barrier was raised.

Some of the first women in the office were 'type-writers'—American women using the newly popular machines in the 1870s. Within a decade or so, a torrent of propaganda was sweeping Victorian England. pamphlets such as 'Should Young Ladies Learn Phonography?' introduced the middle classes to the idea that shorthand might be good for their daughters. In short, there was work for them; businesses were being scientific about profit making, growing larger and, heavens above, here was an endless supply of cheap labour to save the manager's time and trouble. And the creation of the modern dogsbody secretary and highflying executive followed the pattern of another doer-assistant pair: the doctor/nurse. It was, after all, before women had the vote.

So what's new?

Yet, through the 70 odd years of this century, the job hasn't changed much. There has been a recent patchy increase of part-time work: for instance, between 1973-4 the number of women employed part time in public administration and defence, insurance, banking, finance and business services, went up by a third as much again as the number of women employed full time. This is not necessarily progress: otherwise homebound women, desperate for extra cash or self-fulfillment are not in a position to question the conditions of part-time work, which offers disproportionately less security/legal protection compared with full-time work.

The other change, made much of in the early 70s, namely the increase in electronic equipment, has slowed down some since women's labour is still on the whole cheaper. But the main effect of gadgets such as memory type-writers, has been to slightly increase the number of women in pools, or of shared, as opposed to one-to-one secretaries.

Some people now claim secretaries aren't necessary. Robert Townsend, the man who turned the American Avis Rent a Car business from a tiny firm into a rival of Hertz, claims in his book *Up The Organisation* (Joseph, 1970), that secretaries should be abolished as time-wasters. Letters should be replied to mostly by hand, work delegated to lower ranking executives wherever possible, telephoning rationalised into short periods . . . and any needed typing and servicing of the executives done by the pool and switchboard. Apart from the worse place this

particular 'rationalisation' leaves women in, Townsend's theories slipped up some when it came to getting the various drafts of his book typed up: a reliable authority says he had to make use of someone else's secretary!

A rival theory put out in the *Harvard Business Review* by Lane Tracey, claims that secretaries are what makes business work. Starting off from the 'Peter Principle'—widely known in management circles—which states that everyone in the business world is promoted up to the level at which they do the job badly, and stay there, he asks why business works at all? "The obvious conclusion is that our organisations somehow are able to retain a cadre of competent people to whom the 'Peter Principle' does not apply. These people cannot be part of the organisational hierarchy, for there the 'Peter Principle' operates in full force. And yet, to be in a position to carry out the necessary functions of planning, directing and controlling the enterprise, such people must reside at all levels of the administrative hierarchy. What class of people fits this description? The obvious answer is *secretaries*" (AC & LK 7:23).

One thing is certain about present-day secretaries: they should be as white as possible. With criteria for the job including the white male notion of attractiveness, and the prejudice of this country, black women are almost totally excluded from the field. The agencies, who do a massive proportion of recruitment, make sure of this by using tactics such as codes to communicate an applicant's colour over the phone to employers, and lying to non-white applicants. This invisible filter makes the Race Relations Board powerless; and once into a precious job who would complain? They have received only two complaints to date, disproportionately few for the numbers employed in offices. While agencies can profit from this unorganised labour force, it seems racism will remain virtually unfightable in the office world.

Call it choice?

Essential or irrelevant, secretaries are here; how do they deal with their second-class position, and what does it do to them?

Running as a refrain through the comments of secretaries about their work, is that it's a fall-back job: "It's a filler, a filler that may last the rest of my life. If I didn't look at it as a filler, I'd go crazy." "It's not a career; it's marking time." The second woman, incidentally, was the secretary to a Managing Director, with a year's secretarial college and 4½ years experience behind her. A woman doing the graduate course for secretaries at the City of London Polytechnic said: "Everybody on the course—all graduates—said the same thing. This is something to fall back on; I can always temp . . . But what did they all do when they finished? They all became secretaries in a panic." (AC & LK, 2:14).

This isn't to say the job has nothing going for it. It can be interesting and rewarding; it's cleaner and pays better than factory or shop work; it can end at the dot of five with no responsibility; it has some perks—and it's easy. But too often it's unbearably boring, there's overwork with no overtime pay, there's responsibility for mistakes but no credit, and there are conditions and pay scales no man would accept. Yet this isn't the point here: the terrible thing about secretaryism is that for too many women *there is no alternative.* This easy path which teenagers think they chose turns out to be a prison they have been prepared for from birth.

Working class girls want to get out of factory or shop work; they have no real chance of the choice—however limited—offered to boys. Middle class girls fall into it more through doing what they're told, being what they're wanted to be. An American survey showed that under 13 year old girls wanted a wide variety of careers; at adolescence suddenly conformity was more important and their ambitions became more traditional. As the time to choose approaches, the influence of parents, teachers and careers advisors increases. "It was the usual thing—nursing, teaching or secretarial work. My parents felt very strongly that it wasn't worth educating a girl . . . 'You'll find a nice job, dear,' they would say, 'and in three or four years you'll get married'." (AC & LK, 2:1). The girls are brainwashed into having low expectations of themselves, and teachers are largely unhelpful, scared for the child or ignorant of wider possibilities. And a 1973 report notes that careers guidance given to 16 year old girls was 'particularly unsuccessful' and characterised by 'automatically thinking in terms of clerical work or going in for apprenticeships in hairdressing' (AC & LK 2:5).

Besides the pressure from home, and school, the media shower glittery images about secretarial work on young girls—images the polar opposite of any real situation the girl is likely to encounter. Magazine stories promise marriage with the boss, the colleges promise interest, the ads as always promise everything. It's unlikely, however, that the girls believe all this; their acquiescence in the dream is maybe partly a deliberate and humorous attempt to find compensation for what they're beginning to realise they'll never get. And once in the job, it doesn't take long to see you're in a dead end street: roughly four times more boys got day release than girls in 1975 . . . just the same as in 1971. What do you do when the shutters go down?



His reflection

The chief personnel officer at the London HQ of a large industrial company put it precisely: "Let's face it, after you've been a secretary for more than two years, you're no good at being anything else. It's a support role, and it breeds a sup- ▶



port attitude." (AC & LK 3:9). How? To begin with, the work is monotonous and routine. Townsend claims that "Modern organisations are only getting people to use about 20%—the lower fifth—of their capacities. And the painful part is that God (sic) didn't design the human animal to function at 20%. At that pace it develops enough malfunctions to cause a perment shortage of psychoanalysis and hospital beds." He says that if the work isn't above 'the psychic subsistence level' the workers will put all their energy into their private lives! Secretarial magazines are about leisure, not work.

Most of the work is not only below the 'psychic subsistence level'—after all, most factory work is that, too—but has other destructive qualities. While the factory worker just sells her labour, the secretary sells labour plus behaviour. And there seems to be a very particular mental alienation going on too. There was an ad in the window of an office electronics suppliers which read: FROM THOUGHT (picture of man speaking into dictaphone) TO WORDS (woman typing) TO ACTION (man again). The secretary can compose letters just as well as her boss; she can make many of the decisions herself, but she must repress her initiative and creative energy to serve his. Her situation is analogous to that of the slave women who had to look after her master's children in place of her own. Apparently one of Bernard Levin's secretaries who typed out 200,000 words of a draft of a book of his *in her spare time* used suddenly to burst out "I am a mole and I live in a hole." In this context it seems an accurate representation of her mental state; she has made her mind a reflection of his and her energy has gone underground. And so she develops a sense of worthlessness while her boss gets an overdeveloped ego.

This development is helped by other factors. Because his random needs are more important than her work, she cannot even develop a sense of pride in her small tasks, or impose a pace or order of her own on her work. She is trapped in a timeless, static world; bored, she 'switches off'. And lastly, should she doubt her inferiority, the men are constantly around to remind her, for "The image that men have created for the secretary deprives her of her individuality, reduces her to a physical object, and keeps her firmly in her place."(AC & LK 5:14). She's the spectator of a world she can't enter; yet her work is precisely to construct this world.

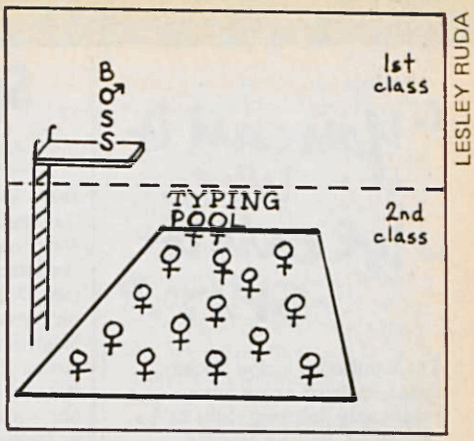
And she does it uncomplainingly, even to the extent that she acquiesces in lying for him as a matter of course. What sense of identity is a person left with at the end of this process? "Sometimes I sit here typing and think that's all I'm good for" (AC & LK 2:15)—this secretary's words are like a recurrent echo to the clacking of typewriter keys.

Changing the office

The most powerful single reason for secretaries' inaction is that any protest, any attempt to change the pay, conditions, and promotional chances of the work, runs them the risk of getting fired by the boss they have been hired to get along with. And as clerical work is the best-paid area of mass employment for women, who would willingly step back into the manual or service work in which so many working class and minority women are trapped? The *New Earnings Survey of 1977* shows that within the field of clerical work, only supervisors get more than the average £50.9 for secretaries; clerical workers get an average of £47.6 compared to £42.5 for manual work and £36.6 for selling jobs. Without union backing against unfair dismissal and the vaguer 'constructive dismissal' (conditions changed so the job becomes intolerable) not much can be done.

And paradoxically there is quite a bit of resistance among the secretaries themselves to the idea of unionisation. As Anna Coote & Laura King put it: "Her job exists because he exists. Consequently she tends to identify herself with the boss and with management, rather than recognise herself as a worker whose interests may well be at odds with those of her employer." (AC & LK 4:17).

Although unionisation is evidently the basis for change, with the exception of TASS, union policy towards secretarial and other office workers is little more than lipservice. To begin with, it is difficult because there is no specific union for secretaries and typists; scattered as low-grade parts of bigger unions, there is virtually no documentation of a workforce that numbers ¾ of a million! The Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff, APEX, comes closest to being a secretary's union; they have no specific programme for secretaries; they have pamphlets with fine statements in the abstract, but when asked to be more specific on equal pay and equal opportunity issues, can let drop views like "I don't think the problem is so great on the non-manual side anyway" (Kathie Dickson, Research Dept). Secretaries who belong to or once joined APEX have nothing good to say about it; complained that "it was all talk . . . I wished I hadn't joined it and I couldn't get out." CPSA and ASTMS both said they had almost no secretaries in their membership and no special pro-

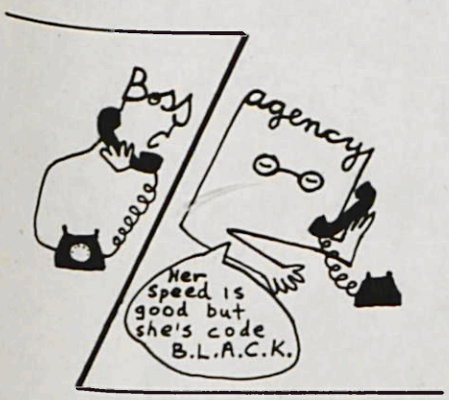


LESLEY RUDA

motion. They're also trying to get 18 months paid maternity leave accepted as basic, and there is talk, but as yet no action, on trying for creches.

gramme; CPSA claimed to have equal pay already, whatever that means for secretaries. Open hostility towards temporary secretaries was exhibited by NALGO in the early 70s attack on government use of employment agencies. On the whole, young women are not seen as serious workers, and there is little indication this attitude is changing.

The only union to make a breakthrough into this difficult area is TASS, as part of their Rights for Women campaign. "We believe in positive discrimination, because unless special attention is paid to the problems of women, their position is usually ignored," says Women's Organiser Judith Hunt. They begin, in their literature for women, by asking such questions as, "Are you satisfied with the pay structure in your company?" and "What are the channels of promotion at your company?", and "Do you think you are worth more money than you are getting?" *(A New Deal For Office Staff).*



After creating an awareness that all may not be well, and union membership is essential for change, there comes the difficult problem of how to achieve equal pay in jobs where there is no comparable man's work. TASS have done this by setting up target figures of what they would expect a man doing the same work to get paid; at present this stands at £69 for a secretary, £64 for a shorthand typist, and £60 for a copy typist. There's naturally a gap between ideals and achievements, but some results, like doubling the office staff wages in a Dumbarton office since the women joined in 1974, are quite spectacular.

They are also fighting for the recognition of the skills of the secretary, and for better conditions on the job. But besides this, they are trying to make equal opportunity a reality. As we have seen, the cards are stacked against girl school leavers: TASS is campaigning for the availability of day release and other training schemes for women to learn the skills needed for pro-

What can be done

While TASS's campaign marks the beginning of women's struggle in the office, its main drawback is that few women can join TASS as it is basically an engineering workers union. And there is a paradox in unionisation of women office workers in that their status and area of work is thereby regularised. This is why TASS feel that it is essential to fight for promotional opportunities and training—but little energy goes into that as yet. And unionisation into less aware unions could well be a double-edged weapon that will only keep the secretary more firmly in her place. But it is essential, because without it women have no power.

A sketch of what offices might be, was made by Anna Coote and Laura King who pictured the future office as a place where people were 'self-servicing'. Everyone would type, for example, and everyone be taken into the firm as an apprentice to be trained for the firm's business. In the rare case of a genius needing an assistant to function, the assistant would be rewarded as being as necessary as the genius . . . and if there were typing specialists, they would be treated as specialists. This utopian picture largely cuts out the servicing side of the picture which, as long as it continues, will probably be done by women, to change the present oppressive situation?

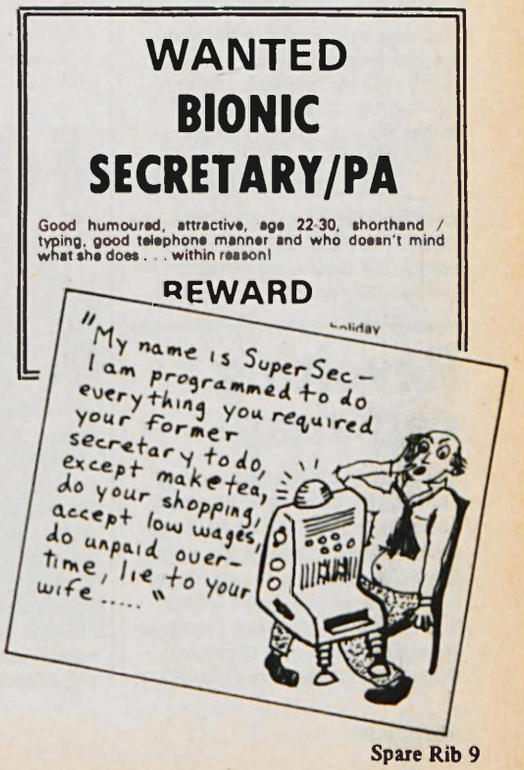
There was, in 1976, in New York, an organisation called Women Office Workers (WOW). Numbering 300 members, they agitated against boredom, low wages, age discrimination, lack of overtime pay, and non-person status. They helped various women in individual struggles, took five age discrimination cases to the NY Human Rights Court, did some research into office worker unemployment and began to open a Pandora's box of problems at a 'speakout' where half the women's speeches were anonymous . . . for the one thing that emerged repeatedly was that any protest ended in firing.

WOW may have folded; a group of women office workers in Boston recently got a new organisation off the ground, the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion. They deal in appropriate fashion with anything from verbal harassment to rape on the job, with a crisis centre, job listings, help with unemployment pay and legal cases. One woman has won 16,000 dollars in back pay because she was fired for refusing her boss's sexual advances! Sounds alright!

In this country, a small group could do a lot, without needing to jeopardise jobs: try to fight racism, research into the area, re-educate teachers and careers advisers, inquire what goes on in secretarial colleges, try to change the media image of women in the office, pressurise the Equal Opportunities Commission to get off its arse, and so on. It would evidently also make a terrific difference if secretaries could begin to meet together to discuss how to deal with the most outrageous infestations of sexism on the job, and begin to retrieve their stolen self-confidence. But unionisation is the main tool for change, and so perhaps the most urgent task facing women who want to change their role in offices would be to compel a union or variety of them to effectively serve *all* women office workers, or create a new one.

In the labour-scarce office market of the 70s, secretaries (and office workers) have tremendous power: it is extraordinary it has hardly been used. But perhaps it is not extraordinary; perhaps a lot of energy has gone into convincing the secretary of her powerlessness; perhaps her power has been made invisible. Whatever the case, the consequences of women office workers beginning to demand their rights will be momentous. Is it possible that the sexist structure of the business world, so far virtually untouched by the women's movement, is less impregnable than it seems? ●

Essential in the writing of this article, although not answerable for any errors and not necessarily similar in views, was a long unpublished paper by ANNA COOTE and LAURA KING. Thank you both very much for allowing me such free use of your work.



"You call it WIT... we call it SHIT."

The Cambridge Union Society (not a students union but a reactionary debating club) held a "funny" debate on March 6, entitled "A Woman's Place Is In The Harem". Part of the university rag week, the event was sponsored by Barclays Bank in aid of the Save the Children Fund. The all-male speakers included Robert Morley and Derek Nimmo, and Princess Anne flew in from Gloucestershire to be a guest.

About 200 pickets, women and men, held banners and chanted slogans like "This debate abuses women", "You call it wit, we call it shit" and "Barclays Bank is a chauvinist wank".

There were problems finding ways of expressing our antagonism effectively; for instance in deciding on tactics—should we obstruct the entrance? should we sit down? should we approach people individually? We couldn't decide beforehand as the picket was made up of a number of disparate groups who turned up on the evening without much previous co-ordination.

Some of the men took aggressive initiatives trying to resist police manoeuvres, when we felt confrontation with police achieved nothing in itself. It was hard to get a majority women's opinion. At one point there was disagreement as to whether to ask men to leave; in the end this wasn't necessary.

We tried to drown the debate with shouts, loudspeakers and stamping. Personally we felt encouraged by the picket. We managed to make an impression and to force those complacently entering—thankfully 80% men—to realise we won't take their jokes at our expense.

Dinah Ward and Holly Aylett

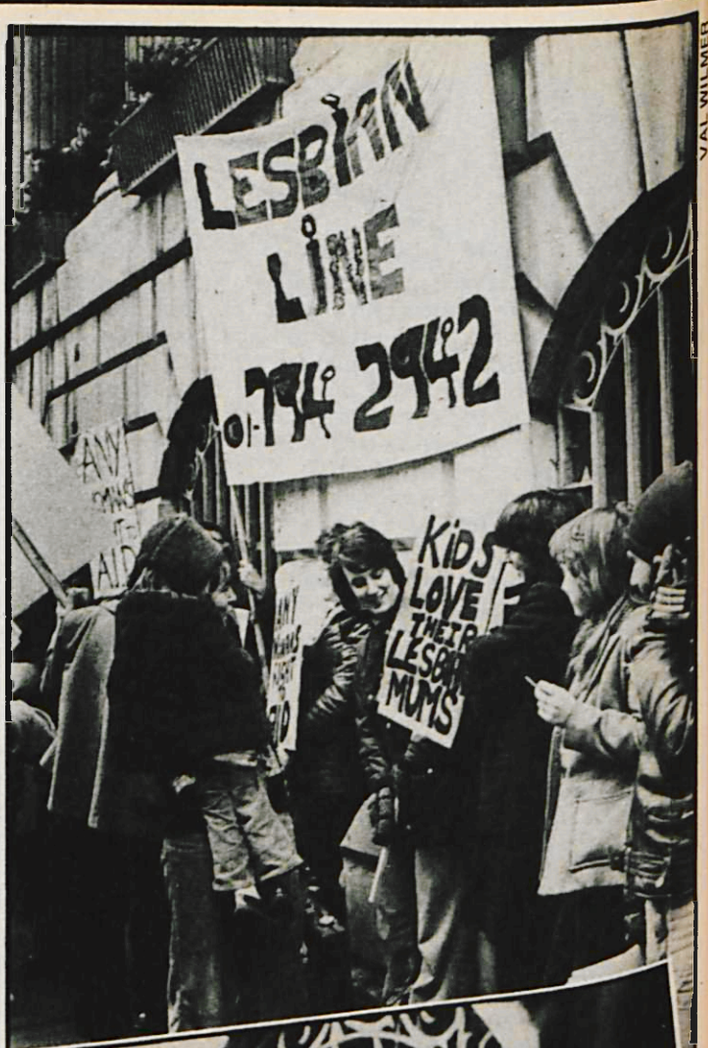
The Cambridge Students Union—part of the NUS—actually came out *against* the demo, saying it was insulting an honoured guest!

Spray it again

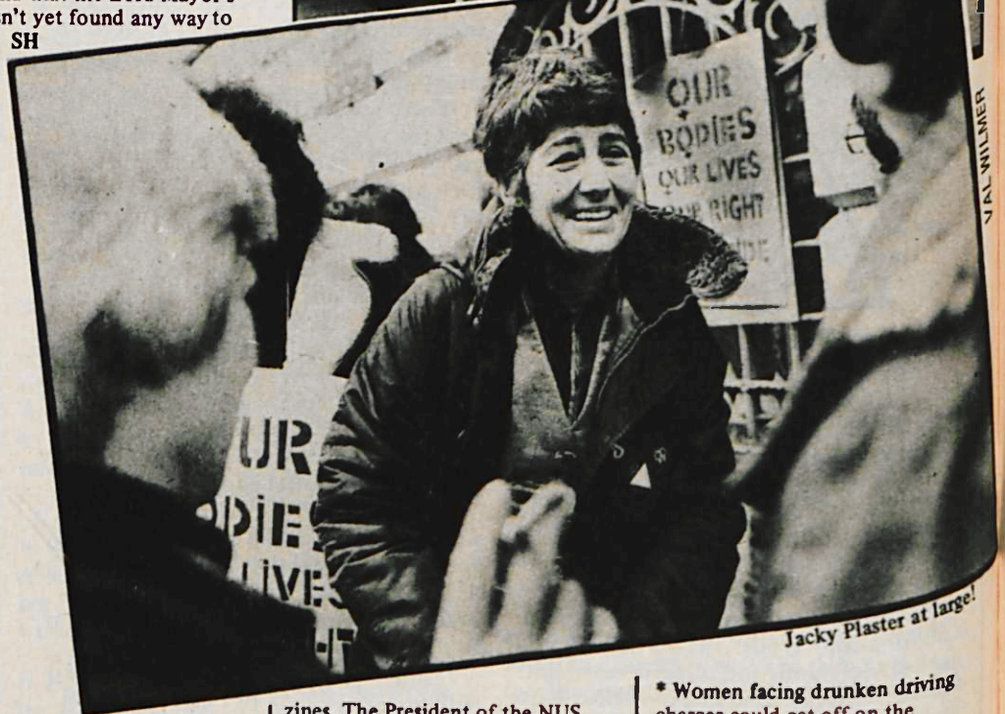
Jacky Plaster, who sprayed 'Lesbians Unite' on three *Evening News* vans during the protest against the attack on AID lesbian mothers (see *SR* 67 & 68) came up for trial on February 23 at Mansion House Magistrates Court, London. A 60-strong picket, well armed with leaflets and banners, were there with her, causing enough inconvenience to ensure her case was heard first of the morning's batch.

Pleading "technically guilty but totally justified" she listened while details of her life were read out, then pointed out to the chairman of the bench that she knew nothing about her judges: he replied that he was the Lord Mayor of London and introduced his mates, Lady Houghton and Sir something-or-other, and among this top notch company the trial got underway. Jacky attempted to explain her motive, whereupon the Lord Mayor replied: "You can't say anything in a court of law, and I am not going to let you use this court to further your cause."

So it was soon over: £25 fine and £5 for the injured vans . . . We've asked the editor of the E. Spews to shell out on Jacky's behalf. After all, the damage he caused was incalculable, and we understand that the Lord Mayor's team hasn't yet found any way to assess it. **SH**



VAL WILMER



VAL WILMER

Jacky Plaster at large!

Revolting rag mags

Women in the National Union of Students have launched an attack on sexism within it. The NUS has prided itself on its fight for equal rights—like refusing to give money to women-only Women's Liberation groups because they discriminate against men!—but somehow women are still heavily outnumbered by men on union committees at local and national levels. For example, on the committee for trainee teachers there are two women and six men, although the ratio of women to men at teacher training colleges is 6:1.

This is less staggering, however, than the reappearance of strip shows in student unions, and the explosion of revolting sexist jokes and adverts in student rag magazines. The President of the NUS, Sue Slipman, seems to feel this is because the Women's Liberation Movement is not trying hard enough to get through to other women. I feel it is because it's always been assumed that middle class student men should somehow be less oppressive than other men—and so don't need to be confronted. But hopefully the new NUS Women's Campaign will start to do this. **RW**

*** Women facing drunken driving charges could get off on the grounds that our bodies produce their own alcohol. A case against male Labour MP Russell Kerr was dropped because 'micro-organisms'—yeasts which make alcohol from sugar in the blood—were found in his urine sample, making it impossible to tell if excess alcohol was caused by drinking too much. In women, these yeasts are a common vaginal inhabitant . . .**

Braineless Bill

Braine's anti-abortion bill (see *SR* 68) has scraped through the Commons with a majority of six. This means it gets a second reading, though it has only the faintest chance of becoming law as the Government is unlikely to make special time for it. The vote is quite encouraging—the last two anti-abortion bills received much larger majorities. JN

Myth exploded

A study of 571 pregnant women in the USA has shown that previous abortions, far from making subsequent pregnancies more difficult or risky, actually appear to lower the occurrence of still births in later deliveries.

The absence of any difference between women who had had abortions previously and those who had not, with respect to the numbers of low birth weight, premature deliveries, miscarriages or congenital malformations, did not depend on the method of abortion or the stage of pregnancy at which the abortion had been done. The two groups of women were carefully matched for all factors of possible relevance, such as 'socio-economic status', age and previous deaths of any foetus, so no difference in these factors could be the reason for the apparently mildly beneficial effect of abortion. Any other suggestions, SPUC? RW

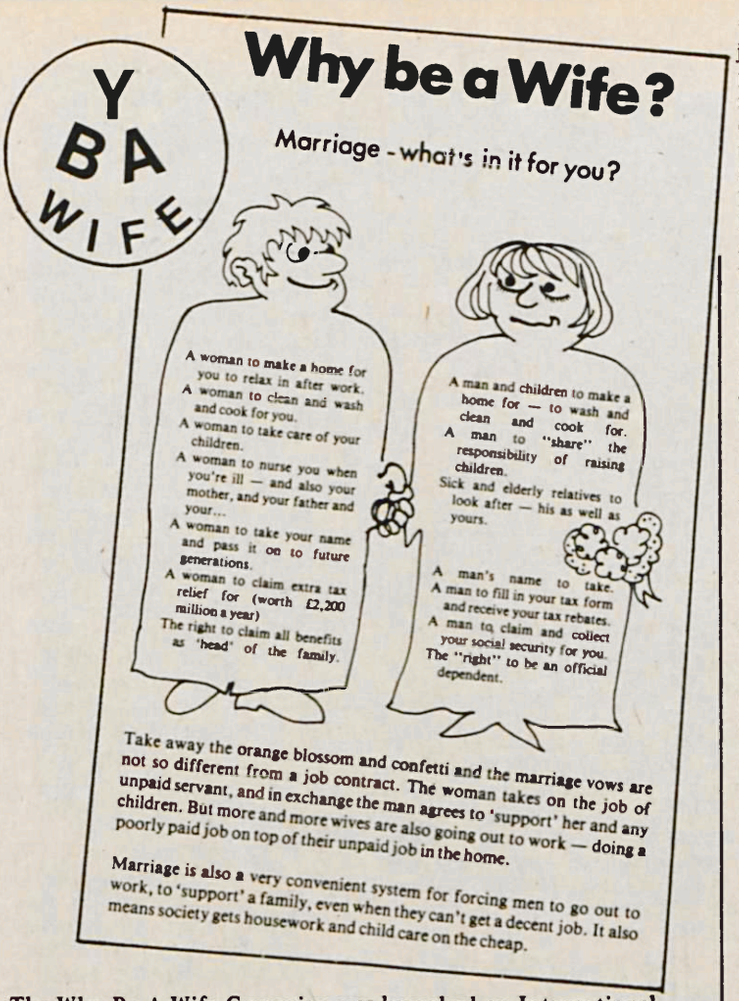
Signs of Life

You'd think that Nuala Scarisbrick, national administrator of the anti-abortion Life group, would be encouraging the setting up of playgroups, given that she's into women having children whether they want them or not. But she's currently campaigning against the setting up of a playgroup in Kenilworth Road, Leamington: "This will create not only a traffic hazard but noise and nuisance to the neighbours." Ms Scarisbrick lives in Kenilworth Road and obviously doesn't want any signs of life in her neighbourhood . . . BC

Third World Mothers

A meeting on the situation of immigrant women in Britain was held in the House of Commons on March 6, organised by the Bangladesh Women's Association in GB, Black Women for Wages for Housework, and the Union of Turkish Women in Britain. About 100 attended, mostly immigrant women. One resolution passed was around the law coming in on April 5, which will phase out child tax allowances for immigrants with children not in Britain and prevent them from getting child benefit (see *SR* 68). It states that "Every woman should have the right to have the children she wants and the removal of child benefit undermines the right of Third World women to have the children *they* want."

The meeting demanded child benefit for all regardless of race and country of origin and of whether the children are in Britain or not and felt child benefit should not be deducted from supplementary benefit. BC



The Why Be A Wife Campaign was launched on International Women's Day. They're planning a mass send-in of tax returns embellished with a sticker saying "This form is offensive to women!" Another sticker asks "Is there life after marriage?" Contact the Campaign c/o 214 Stapleton Hall Rd, London N4 for stickers, leaflets and badges *(shown above)*

Mona Flora

Bizarre theory from Flora margarine's press office . . . Mona Lisa ate too many fatty foods, giving her a high cholesterol condition easily discerned by the yellowed corners of her left eye! Dr Haruo Nakamura from Tokyo makes this claim after months studying X-rays of Leonardo da Vinci's sixteenth century portrait. The Louvre confirms that the yellowing is not discoloration but part of the original. Nakamura claims that when blood cholesterol is too high, skin round the knees, elbows and ankles goes yellow—and the corners of the eye.

Lisa was 24 and had just had a baby when she posed for the picture—"During pregnancy, women build up large supplies of cholesterol but this normally decreases after the birth. In Mona Lisa's case, it appears she retained most of her pregnancy cholesterol—a dangerous sign in such a young woman." Well. JN



Pointing out cholesterol in Mona Lisa's eye

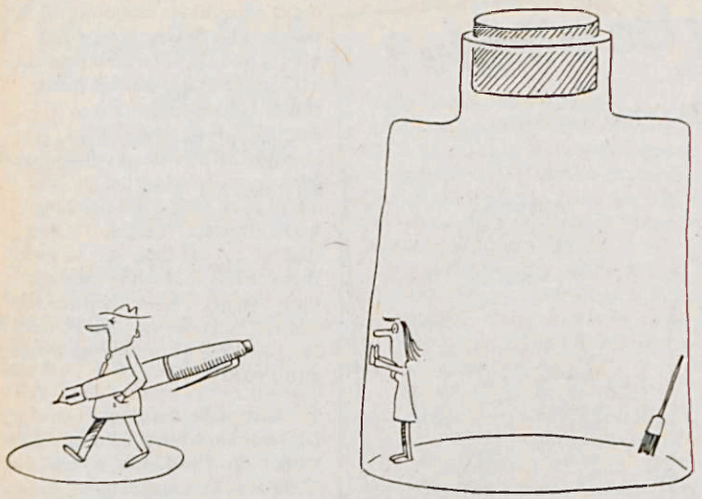
*** Did you hear the one about the** judge who thinks unemployed people who 'waste' their dole money should have their ears cut off? Judge Starforth-Hill made this charming suggestion at Southampton Crown Court, hearing the case of an unemployed Irishman who admitted stealing a £30 coat. He'd been drinking when arrested. "I think it's time that we cut off their ears to make them realise that when they get their benefit it is for their families and not to go down their throats." Just the kind of protection women don't need . . .

*** Liberty Life Assurance Co** has announced that a housewife's work is worth £114.80 a week That's in the South East—the replacement value is reckoned at £79.60 in the West, £83.80 in East Anglia, £85.40 in the North, £93.60 in the Midlands, £81.20 in Scotland and £77 in Northern Ireland. The point of the survey is, of course, to get more husbands to insure their wives' lives. Apparently only one in 18 does. "Most husbands appear to attach no financial value to their wives' work," says Liberty Life's chairman . . .

*** Answering a Parliamentary** question about a man with two wives, 20 children and £128 a week in benefits, Social Security Minister Stanley Orme explained that a man qualifying for benefit can claim for any dependents living with him. "It would be inappropriate to exclude from such arrangements a mistress or second wife living in the same household as this might lead to her establishing an entitlement to benefit in her own right at greater cost to public funds." And that would *never* do . . .

*** Only 46 of the 97 education** authorities in Britain have bothered to apply for central government grants available for building much-needed nurseries. The National Union of Teachers commented, "At this rate, nursery education will come to a stop". . .

*** An 18-year-old woman whose** 'untidy' appearance weighed against her when she went to court to fight for custody of her 21-month-old daughter, has now won custody after all. Two High Court judges felt the magistrates were wrong to assume that the buttons missing from her coat meant she was incompetent. "It is a bold deduction that an untidy mother is likely to be a bad mother," said Justice Arnold. The magistrates also held against her that she had asked her mother-in-law for advice about the baby's nappy rash—showing a lack of maternal instinct?—and that she had "not been frank" about her relationship with a neighbour. The High Court judges at least acknowledged that none of this necessarily made her unfit to care for a child . . . JN



FROM SORCIERES

London Region Revolutionary Feminist Conference

It's shaken us up again . . . and left us with an exhilarated strength, to cut through the lies which so often obscure our experience as women.

Daring to speak our imagination, trusting our experience as women, being bold and sharp, trying to step outside the patterns which we know strangle us. We saw glimmers—very faint ones—of what might be womanthought. Fluidity. How can we create ourselves out of a void when we have no structures within or outside to express all the levels of our experience? We were looking for keys, doors, handles, together. We were there, all of us, because we feel underdeveloped, invisible. We knew we have to take it back to the beginning; reclaiming our female experience, our affinities, our biology . . .

Anny Brackx, Ruth Wallsgrove

DANGER - Hair Dyes

New EEC regulations on cosmetics fail to bar the continued widespread sale of hair dye ingredients believed to be a serious cancer risk. Research in Britain and the US suggests that some components used in both permanent and semi-permanent hair dyes, lumped together in the EEC statement as p-Phenylenediamine (and salts), are powerful carcinogens, yet the EEC regulations would allow them to be present at up to six per cent of the marketed product. Such permissiveness seems to be related to commercial convenience and profit rather than scientific assessment of hazards.

Experiments on the skin of animals at the Department of Cancer studies and the Medical School at Birmingham University have confirmed carcinogenic activity of the dye components. The Cancer Research Campaign recently gave £6000 to Dr Searle at the Birmingham Department to continue this research.

US investigations which have shown that some of the components are strongly positive in cell mutation and bacterial tests, and that workers in cosmetics and hairdressing show an increased incidence of many kinds of cancer, have led the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to issue a warning on the compounds, saying they should "be handled in the workplace as if they were human carcinogens".

Though not complete, the evidence is substantial enough for the EEC regulations to need urgent amendment. **JN**

Down the Drain

The Equal Opportunities Commission recently allocated its budget for the year—£32,000 for education and research projects. Under research were such worthies as £1,500 for work on "the evolution of a framework for the formulation of non-sexist language and a glossary of non-sexist job titles" and £6,000 to the Association of Assistant Mistresses for investigation into employment and career patterns of women teachers. Research scooped up two-thirds of the budget and educational/practical projects only a third.

If this weren't enough to suggest an imbalance towards research on the part of the EOC, their announcement a month later made their priorities clear: they, with the Social Science Research Council, will be putting £240,000 into researching 'Women and Underachievement' (or why can't a woman be more like a man!). And the EOC still has no intention of prioritising practical projects in its next annual budget.

So what will the £240,000 pay for that we don't already know? The EOC and SSRC's recent press conference didn't make clear. Derek Robinson of the SSRC allowed that "there's a lot about discrimination that we don't understand . . . the extent of discrimination, how does it happen and the efficacy of the anti-discrimination measures we are taking".

Going on to say they were "concerned with the tangible" didn't mean that they'd be looking for example at nursery provision, maternity or paternity leave—"that's not very high on our list of priorities". So presumably all that loverly money will be spent on telling us that women just don't get as far as men in promotion and training . . .

Angela Phillips



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

Marching down to Brixton on a sunny afternoon . . . the London International Women's Day march broke the two month ban on all marches imposed under the Public Order Act to stop the National Front parading through Ilford. We felt the NF march should have been banned under the Race Relations Act and we certainly weren't going to let anyone ban us!

Police were puzzled, told us not to carry banners, to stay on the pavement, to "amble in a ladylike fashion". I think they wanted a nice white middle-class chivalrous relationship and were quite put out when women jeered at them and when our anger erupted as we passed a "juicy fruity" poster. We chanted "police protect pornography" as they lined up in its defence, pretending not to see a passing man attack a woman photographer. But we insisted and they had to take his name. **JN**

NEWS COPYDATES

SR 70—March 30
SR 71—April 27
It's worth trying after these dates.
PLEASE KEEP SENDING US YOUR NEWS

Kilwinning CONNED

Over 100 women at the Essex international Factory in Kilwinning, Ayrshire, have been told they are NOT to get the payrise promised to them that ended their strike last September (see *SR* 63). They have also been told that if they strike again the factory will be closed.

The women, who staged an eight week strike followed by an eight week sit-in, ended their action when the company agreed to raise their wages into line with the women in the Derry factory who were earning £8 a week more for the same job. The rise was due to take effect on October 5. In return the women agreed to accept work-timing and work sheets. The company was also to introduce a bonus system meant to stimulate efficiency.

Several women spoke of the conditions at Essex but for fear of dismissal wish to remain anonymous. High unemployment in the area means that Essex has no trouble replacing its work force.

"We have gained nothing from the strike. The only wage increase we have had is the 10% government increase which we would have got anyway. The management denies ever agreeing to the other increase. We have also been told our efficiency must increase from 24-50% before any bonus system will take effect."

"We were going to strike again when we realised we had been conned, but we were told if we did the plant would be closed. We now have a professional Security Firm on 24-hour guard in the factory; we must sign in–and out."

Engineering union official Bill Aitkin said "This paydeal was made in good faith; I feel the conduct of the Essex International management confirms my opinion that they are the worst employers I have ever met in my entire career."

Sandi Ritchie-Urquhart

See SR *65 for the full story of a long and very violent strike against Essex International in Elmwood, USA.*

*** Trust Houses Forte whose poverty wages and anti-union bullying were exposed in *SR* 67, has surprised the stock exchange with 1977's profits, which top £38 million. Shares shot up 6p in one day to 184p each. Wages stayed put . . .**

CORRECTION

The contact address for Brighton Women against Fascism (see *SR* 67) should be Sue G, Soc/Sci Pigeonhole P/8, Univ of Sussex, Brighton



JINI RAWLINGS

"There's no modern equipment, we have to use a mop and bucket."
"If someone's ill we have to do their work as well, but we don't get any extra for it."
"We came out on strike because we wanted a fair wage and recognition of the union."

At a time when the rate for a cleaner in a state school is £1.26 an hour, cleaners and other domestic staff get 57p an hour at the Royal Russell School, Croydon. The school, set in 90 acres of grounds, charges fees of £1,800 a year and employs 46 domestic staff–17 non-union catering staff and 29 unionised cleaners, laundry workers and sewing assistants.

These 29 have been on strike since February 20, when non-union kitchen staff received a 10% wage increase while union members were told to negotiate through their union, the General and Municipal Workers Union. Since at the time the school refused to recognise the union or meet representatives, this was impossible. They had previously made an ACAS application for union recognition and a fair wage and decided that their only course was to come out on official strike.

"People say why do we work here, at less than £15 for a 25 hour week. Well, the hours suit us, there aren't many part time jobs about and we've got the holidays with the kids which is most important." "Anyway there's a waiting list for cleaners at state schools."

The Royal Russell justifies its low pay by allowing the women to take their children to work with them during half term holidays–a total of two weeks a year.

The GMWU sees the recognition dispute as crucial and although the women only joined in November they are getting strike pay as well as donations from well-wishers. Other unions have been supportive: the Transport and General has told delivery men not to cross picket lines and even non-union drivers have refused to cross. Secretaries from the local GMWU office have been picketing with the cleaners.

Jini Rawlings

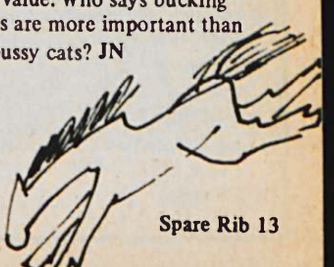
Support etc to Helen Eadie, organisation officer GMWU, 205 Hook Road, Chessington, Surrey.

*** In the first successful case** under the Race Relations Act (1976), a white woman has proved that she was refused a job because her husband is black. The fact that the discrimination arose from his colour not hers was "neither here nor there" said the Birmingham tribunal. During a job interview at TV Steelworks, Mr Butler, chairman of the company, said he had no intention of hiring the only other applicant because she sounded West Indian. He went on to say that he personally had little time for coloured folk, and had failed to sell his house when the buyer saw blacks in the area. Later, having virtually offered her the job, he discovered that her husband was black . . .

*** Two women who work the day-shift** at a colliery canteen in Staffs have won on appeal the right to equal pay with the man who runs the canteen at night. This means an extra £10 a week each plus a free coal facility worth £5 a week. Justice Phillips said that if a man and woman did the same work, it wasn't important that they did it at different times. But the Coal Board, scared that other workers will use the decision and add a "substantial sum" to its wages bill, was given leave to make a further appeal . . .

*** Six women foundry workers** from Tipton in the West Midlands have proved that though their jobs are lighter than the men's, their quicker work rate means they often produce more in a week. The men had been given bigger pay-outs from a bonus pool on the assumption that their muscle power produced more finished work. The women will get £1000 each in back pay and an £11 a week pay rise . . .

*** A Birmingham industrial tribunal** has ordered that vet Catherine Flannigan be paid the same as a male colleague. When she joined the practice, she agreed to treat mainly domestic pets, though she had experience with large animals and was quite willing to treat them. Her employer felt large animal work needed 'a man's strength'–and farmers preferred men. Ms Flannigan said "I can handle a bucking pony as well as many men. I can deal with any large animal on a farm." Agreeing that she could do the same work as the men and was available to replace them, the tribunal added £450 a year to her £4500 salary and awarded £350 back pay. That's good, though it doesn't challenge the idea that muscles are the root of all value. Who says bucking ponies are more important than sick pussy cats? **JN**



a woman's work is never done



poster from the Spanish Women's Liberation Movement

No 12 Waitresses
No 14 Working in fashion shops
No 16 Women in factories
No 17 Busking
No 18 The relationship between oversupervision and boredom
No 22 Working on the buses . . . Training to be a doctor
No 23 Out of Work—understanding the Social Security . . . Struggling with the BBC Documentary Department
No 31 What happened at Heywood—women's strike let down by men . . . Teachers in schools for the severely subnormal . . . How social work is taught
No 32 Why does Spare Rib work as a collective? . . . Jessie, trade unionist activist . . . Women and Education newsletter . . . Review: Ann Oakley's studies of housework . . . plus nursery workers, women workers in Wales
No 33 Homeworkers . . . plus clothing workers strike, women workers in the media, women in NALGO, maids sue Columbia University
No 34 Women's employers—General Electric Company . . . Women organise in the Musicians Union . . . plus homeworkers campaign, student nurses, textile workers protest, librarians for social change
No 35 General Electric Company continued . . . Discrimination in the film industry . . . plus Fakenham Shoe Co-op, domestic appliances
No 36 Crossfield Electronics occupation, women's TUC, NUPE gay group
No 39 Asian women strike at Heathrow, women in National Labour History Museum
No 40 Reviews: 'Women and Work', an exhibition on the division of labour in industry; and 'The Nightcleaners Part 1', a film about cleaners
No 41 Probation Officer—the work and its frustrations . . . The Working Women's Charter
No 42 Bus Drivers—discrimination by London Transport . . . Review: 'Women Work in Hackney', an exhibition of photos by Hackney Flashers
No 43 How to handle an Industrial Tribunal and win . . . Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act—real equality now?? . . .
No 44 Photofeature on Equal Pay and The Crisis . . . Live-in Maid at the beginning of the century . . . Art as a profession
No 46 Yorkshire Fisherwomen look back
No 47 Review: 'Silent Sisterhood', book on Victorian middle-class housewives . . . plus fighting for equal pay in Scotland, Working Women's Charter conference, nightcleaner wins case
No 48 "I'm gonna be an electrical engineer" . . . plus Portuguese cleaners unite, Playgroup Workers Movement, Kent farmworkers fight for equal pay
No 49 Workers in adventure playgroups . . . Trico—women on strike for equal pay . . . Midwives
No 50 Trico continued . . .
No 51 Tribunals, temps and Trico
No 52 Trico—still struggling, tribunals, TUC conference and what's in it for women
No 53 Working in a playgroup . . . Trico women win! . . . plus secretaries demonstrate in New York, more tribunals
No 54 Brook Street Bureau . . . The Cuts and women's work . . . plus lesbians ignite, Grunwicks, working with asbestos, Homeworkers, Charter . . .
No 55 Union recognition strikes and tribunals
No 56 Reviews: 'People Working'—a [illegible] of non-sexist children's books; an [illegible]ut! On the Costa del Trico', a play [illegible] Women's Theatre Group . . . Prostitutes organise . . . Equal pay struggles . . . Guide to maternity rights
No 57 Struggles—Grunwicks, Electrolux, wives support occupation at Wildt Mellor Bromley, the right to wear trousers . . . Women and protective legislation
No 58 TUC women's conference . . . Builder sacked for swearing . . . plus strikes for equal pay at Yardley's and Trust Houses Forte, and tribunal results
No 59 Working for the Union . . . Chambermaids strike at Charing Cross Hotel . . . plus Grunwicks, and fashion workers on strike for equal pay
No 60 The Equal Opportunities Commission—Mice in Manchester . . . Cardiographers make a stand . . . Women stop Jubilee TV coverage . . .
No 61 Grunwick—why the women are striking, and why their sisters are supporting them
No 62 Occupying British Steel—2 women talk about becoming radicalised . . . plus tribunal results, occupation at Essex International, strike at Batchelor's
No 63 Domestic workers meet in Canada . . . plus tribunals, Grunwicks, Essex International, and How to Advance Your Husband's Career
No 65 State Mums—women working in children's homes and 'malad' schools . . . Essex International strong arm tactics in USA . . . Sneaking round the Sex Discrimination Act
No 66 Homeworkers—sweatshops at home . . . Changing childcare 1: non-biological mothers . . . Looks discrimination in USA
No 67 The Cinderella Industry—hotel and catering workers . . . Changing Childcare 2: men's approach . . . Women farmers in Zambia . . . Fiction on housework . . . plus secretarial agency for 'older women', more about what the EOC is not doing
No 68 Changing Childcare 3: And what about the children? . . . Hairdressing Juniors—the bald facts . . . subversive secretaries on *The Times*

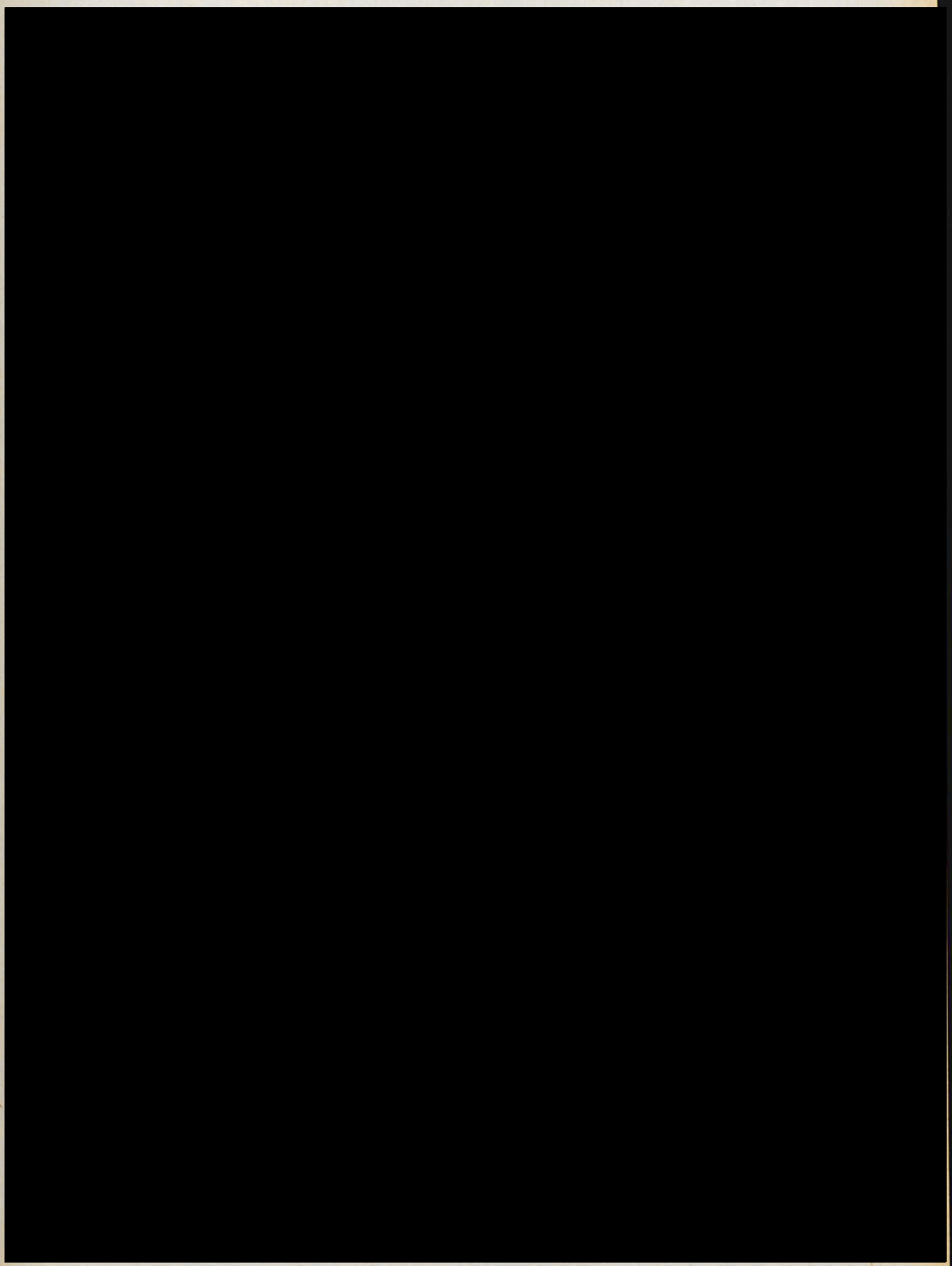
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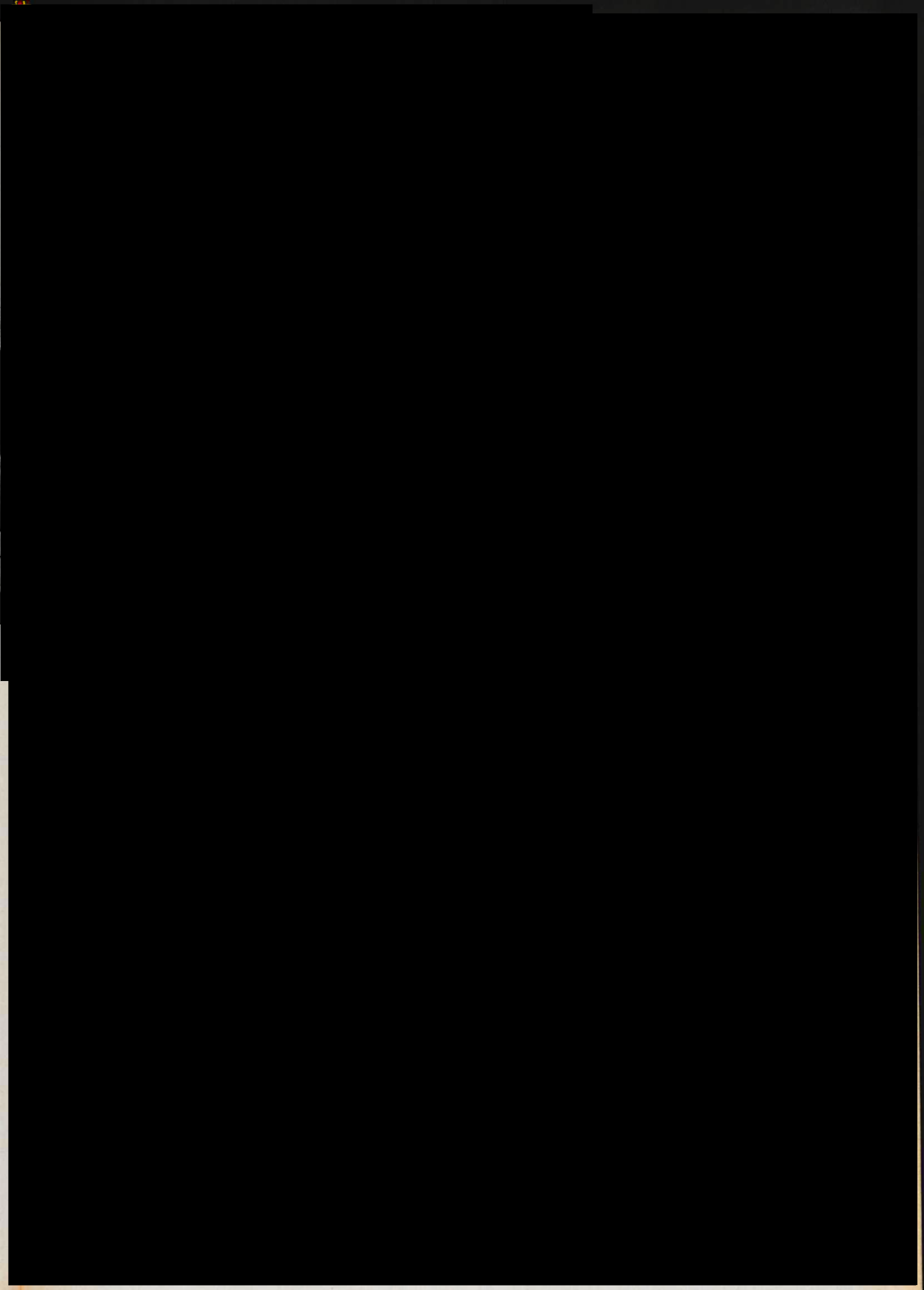
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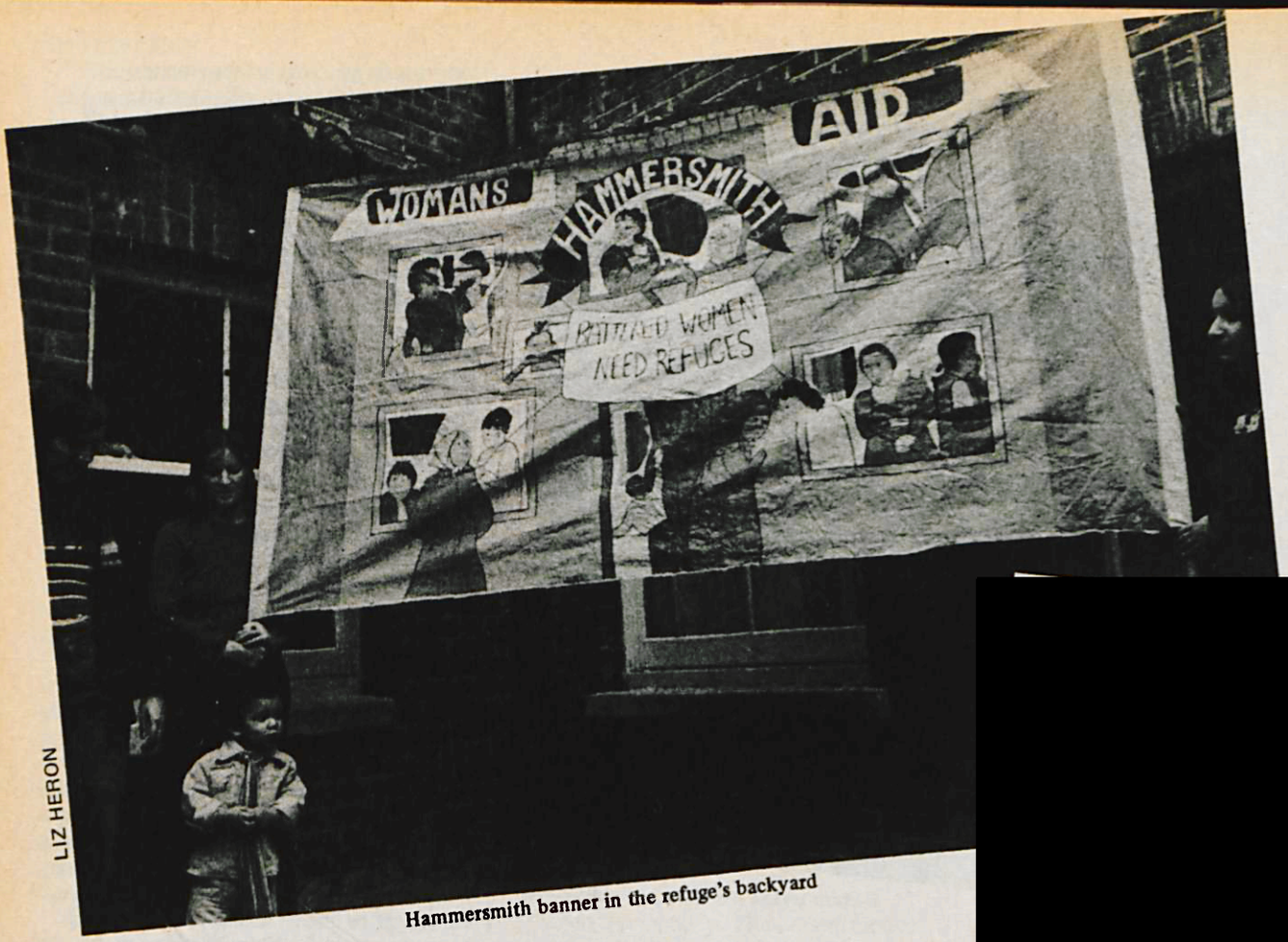
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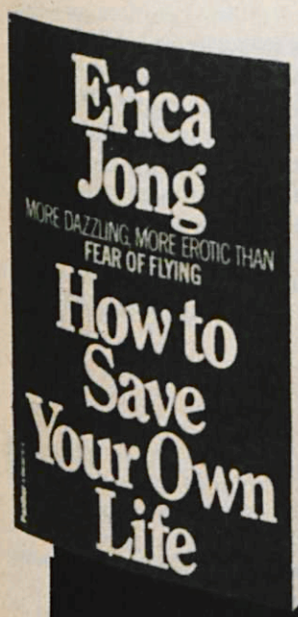




LIZ HERON

Hammersmith banner in the refuge's backyard

[redacted]



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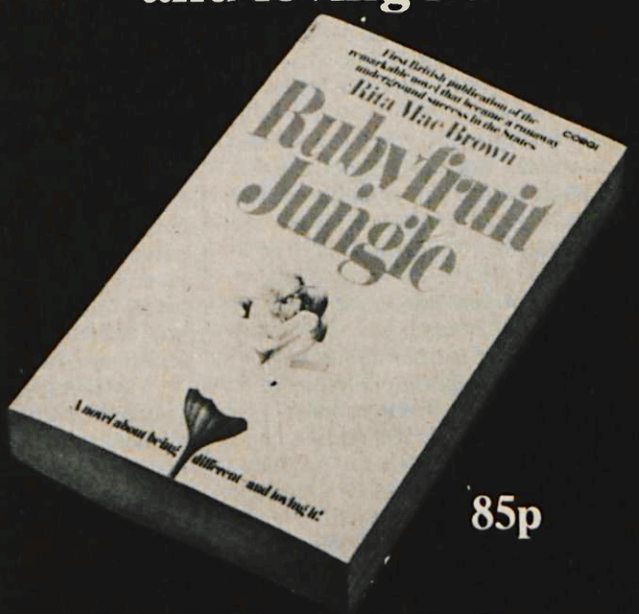
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FORUM

We have decided to have a 'Forum' page in *Spare Rib* because we feel the need to create a space for discussions about issues being raised within the Women's Liberation Movement. We don't intend 'Forum' to represent clear-cut for/against arguments, but want women to write from different perspectives, bringing out the complexities of the issues being discussed. In future issues of *Spare Rib* we hope to have articles on, for example, whether women are a class, protective legislation, matriarchies, what is a feminist approach to fighting racism and fascism?, guaranteed minimum income, violence/anger, couples/monogamy, campaigns—can they be revolutionary? We'd like contributions and suggestions and also your responses to the articles, which we'll print on a 'follow-up' letters' page.

Therapy: Reform or Revolution

Despite the women's movement, women continue to co-operate unintentionally in their own subordination. The basic psychology of the female, which is based on passivitiy, being nurturant and giving up one's (own) needs for nurturance, is still operating for women of our generation *

Therapy has something to offer women that action, study and consciousness-raising can't give. The therapy that I've done (a mixture of feminist and non-feminist, group and individual, therapy) has helped me to become less depressed, more angry, more able to know what I need and act on it, though it has been painful and uneven.

Mostly therapy is used in a way which controls women and encourages us to accept things as they are. It has developed inside the 'personal' sphere of the personal /political split, where responsibility for change is laid at the feet of individuals. Not only do you feel bad, but it's your fault. The split between home and work, between individual and social, makes it difficult to work on both public-political and personal-political fronts at once; there's a danger of going too far one way or the other . . . but that's a key problem for the women's movement as a whole and we can't afford to neglect either.

The roots of most of the problems therapy has to deal with are social and need to be fought directly, collectively. But a lot of women need individual help to be able to fight, or even to keep going. As one woman put it, "therapy can save lives". One in six women try to get help from the NHS at some time in their lives, and there's a growing demand for therapy amongst women in the movement. I don't see therapy as an end in itself, or something that every woman needs or should do. It can't be a substitute for collective action, for study or consciousness-raising. But there are skills and knowledge developed over the last 80 years which can be used by us, critically, to serve our own ends. We would be throwing the baby out with the bath water not to use them.

We need to build resources and experience inside and outside the NHS to help women who break down in a way that friends and family can't cope with or help; women who face persistent depressions, suicidal feelings, anxiety, phobias or eating problems, as well as women who just want to know themselves better, to be able to take responsibility for themselves within the limiting conditions of their social circumstances, and to change deeply held patterns of timidity, dependence, or self-hate. We can also use therapy to develop a better understanding of the psychology of oppression, of how deeply we have taken sexism into our personalities.

Why therapy? Because most therapies assume that some things can only be explained by unconscious motivation and that until you can understand the way conscious and unconscious work together or (more often) in opposition, there's a lot you can't explain or change. For example you feel dead or empty, or you can't make decisions. You're exhausted whenever you try to learn how to mend a car, or to read a difficult book. You burst into tears when you mean to be angry. You can't stop eating or smoking or hurting the people you love; you are turned on by particularly sexist men; you go blank whenever you want to speak out at a workshop; you can't remember things. The sort of things you make resolutions about, but something sabotages your good intentions over and over again, a part of you you don't know about. Therapy helps to find out what, so that you can have greater control of yourself (often by controlling yourself less).

It could be something in you that treats you as you've been treated; a voice that says you're stupid, too loud, immoral. The critical voice of your father, your mother, teachers, friends, lovers, the media: internalised oppression, the 'policemen' in your head that step on you and drive you to step on others without understanding why. It could be a deep need denied by your 'policemen'—for nurturance or achievement, or held back anger. In the therapy groups I was in, it was very hard for most of us women to identify, let alone express, anger. It was easier to cry, criticise, reproach, or be depressed, and that was just as true for the feminists as the non-feminists amongst us.

We become the individuals we are after years of interacting in particular contexts of sex, family, class, race etc. We respond to these givens in unique ways, taking them inside our heads, organising them consciously and unconsciously into patterns of feeling and thought which don't automatically change when social changes occur—and can't simply be changed by an act of will. Changing or breaking down the patterns may trigger off a crisis which needs reliable support from an individual or group, plus particular techniques and detective work, for getting at unconscious material and helping the woman to integrate it with her conscious feelings and self images. The patterns are likely to be contradictory, formed at different ages and to be many layered. The most obvious one may not be the most important. A part of you identifies with a man, perhaps. One part of you is two years old and terrified of

* *Luise Eichenbaum & Susi Orbach from the Women's Therapy Centre, London, in Humpty Dumpty No 8.*

being abandoned. Another part is 35 and independent. One part is ambitious and competitive. Another abhors success. Women's liberation can add an extra paralysing conflict. We aren't supposed to feel competitive or jealous of other women; we're supposed to be strong, angry, independent, etc. This can set up a double repression.

I think that accepting and 'owning' what you are, what your circumstances have made you, and what you have made of them, consciously or unconsciously, in all its pain and messy contradiction, is a basis both for personal change and for an honest feminist politics.

Stef Pixner

The above article is a reprint of a paper presented at the Women and Mental Health Conference, October 1977.

Prostitutes organise

Many feminists are suspicious of prostitutes because they see them as choosing to service men, and reinforcing men's view of women as sex objects; because they make a business of what we hope will *some* day be done for pleasure between equals who care for each other. This attitude ignores the lack of choice that all women have in this society. Women who cannot, or don't want to, be financially dependent on one man through marriage—itself a financial deal—can live on social security benefits or get for the most part obscenely low wages in 'women's' jobs—or can trade on men's view of sex to get more money. Can we really say that prostitutes service men or pander to their sexuality any more than other women in our society? If we try to understand how we are all pushed to accept our roles and men's image of us, knowing that *we* are not to blame for the limitations on our lives—why do some of us feel we can condemn prostitutes? Prostitution is an institution that exists because it is to men's advantage, as is marriage. We can, and must, criticise those *institutions*; but meanwhile we support prostitutes in their fight against sexist soliciting laws.

Ruth Wallsgrove

Birmingham PROS describe the campaign:

Today thousands of men will use street prostitutes in secrecy then return home safely to their wives and children. But some of the prostitutes will be sent to prison. All will go in fear of arrest and harassment. All face social stigma.

It is a bizarre and unjust situation. Now street prostitutes are organising against it. Susan is a founder member of PROS, Programme for Reform of the Laws on Soliciting, the pressure group formed in Birmingham last year by prostitutes, lawyers and social workers to campaign for changes in the law. Her comment is, "All the girls want the law to be changed but until PROS started they were too frightened to come out. Many still are."

PROS' greatest problem has been the risks street prostitutes run if they speak out publicly against the current law. As Ann, another PROS' member puts it, "If a girl speaks out and reveals what she does there can be repercussions from the police, harassment if she's a council tenant, her family and kids can have it taken out on them. Worst of all her bloke risks being locked up." Most prostitutes are not 'run' by ponces, but the men that they live with can be charged with living on immoral earnings if they know a woman is a prostitute and she contributes to their living expenses.

Women like Ann and Susan and some other members of PROS have been prepared to speak out however. They also want to set the record straight on the law in practice, their customers and working conditions, the role of the police and the effects of their job on their private lives.

The law relating to street prostitution sounds straightforward. Prostitution is legal. Only certain activities connected with it are not. Since the Street Offences Act 1959, a woman soliciting or loitering is cautioned twice. The third time she is charged and brought to court. There police evidence is introduced in the following terms:– "I know this woman to be a common prostitute". The maximum penalty for a first offence is £50, for a second offence £200, for a third offence £200 or three months imprisonment.

In practice the law seriously threatens civil liberties. Carol has had long experience of what it means. "Once you're known as a common prostitute all the police have to prove is that you've been seen standing or walking in an area known for prostitution. Most of the girls live in or near these sort of areas so it means you can be picked up as soon as you step outside your own front door.

"When you're in court they read out that you're a common prostitute before you've even pleaded. It's bound to prejudice your chances of a fair hearing."

Also there are two parties involved –the customer and the prostitute. The customer is usually the more active party in approaching the prostitute, yet only the prostitute is subject to legal process. The Street Offences Act discriminates against the poorer end of the trade as well. Wealthier call girls need never fear arrest because they are not operating on the streets.

But the worst aspect of the law is the use of imprisonment. A prostitute can face a prison sentence on the basis of police evidence alone. It's not necessary for anyone to make a complaint to the police in order for a charge to be brought. Also arrests are made most frequently late at night. Characteristically the only parties on the street then are the vice-squad, the pros and their customers.

The Home Office itself has admitted that imprisonment is no deterrent.[1] It is particularly hard on street prostitutes, most of whom are young, lacking family support and permanent accommodation with young children to care for.

So, PROS' three primary aims are abolition of imprisonment for soliciting and loitering; abolition of the offences of soliciting and loitering and ending the use of the term 'common prostitute' in legal proceedings. Mythology has it that prostitutes' customers are abnormal, perverts, men who can't get sex any other way. But in reality they are just 'Mr Average'. Susan: "You get all ages and from all walks of life, from a bloke on the scaffolding to your posh executive in a company car." And it's not just about sex. "Quite a few men don't want intercourse, they are happy just to talk or fondle you." She says of her respectable middle class customers, "Of course what they like about going to a prostitute rather than having it off with their secretary is that there is no come-back on them."

'Doing business'

Prostitutes in general try to make a clear divide between their work and the rest of their lives, to make their interactions with customers straight forward business deals.

Set against £200 fines the rates street prostitutes charge their customers are very low–£5 to £10 a time. Often this is for masturbation or heavy petting rather than full sex. On average customers will get about ten minutes with a prostitute in their own parked cars or in back alleyways to houses. Kissing is not usually allowed and the man has to wear a contraceptive. Many prostitutes won't cater for men with unusual sexual tastes though if they do so the price rises accordingly, as it does if women are operating indoors in rooms or their own houses.

The disadvantages of the job– besides legal penalties, police harassment and stigma–centre on the threat of violence. All the prostitutes belonging to PROS in the Birmingham area have experienced at least one serious physical assault from customers.

Ponces using violence to send women out onto the streets are much rarer than myth suggests, but they do exist.

The advantages of prostitutes' work are many and unpublicised. They challenge the industrial work ethic and acceptance of inconvenient working conditions as women's lot. The following comments are typical, "I can work at my own pace", "I can hustle when I want to", "I don't have to work set hours but to suit myself and the kids", "It fits in with the children being at school".

Of course the money is important, though the amount that street prostitutes clear—given expenses, fluctuating trade and keeping a wary eye open for the law—is probably less than people imagine. Carol and Susan suggest about £50 a week on average. It is still more than they would get on supplementary benefit or in unskilled, boring jobs with inconvenient hours for women with young children. As Ann explains "It's interesting work and what would be the alternative, stacking tins of beans in Tesco's for a pittance?"

Apparently more desirable or respectable outlets for prostitution such as the telephone trade or the mushrooming 'bent' sauna trade have serious snags. If you work on your own and get clients by phone you are confined to the house and you still run the risk of violence when clients arrive. The sauna trade offers protection from police harassment which is why many women have entered it.

However, the working conditions offer no job security. Women will either get a very small retainer or *pay the employer* a fee for advertising expenses. They work on average an eight hour day, getting clients in rotation and charging them 'extras'. No tax or insurance is likely to be paid. No unionisation is possible—straight away it would reveal the illegal nature of the establishment. PROS' members working on the streets and in saunas suggest that the 'bent' sauna trade is currently the site of organised vice because the money is there rather than in the street trade; receptionists and managers front the establishments for the actual owners, accepting the risks of prosecution. The other great drawback to work in saunas is loss of control over the pace of work. Ann commented "It's like working in a sex factory." The one development no-one fancies is state brothels, because of the regimentation implied.

'The Vice'

Criticisms of the vice-squad—or 'the vice' as it is commonly known—concentrate on their lack of fairness and the brutalising effect of their job. The consensus is that policies such as increasing arrests for loitering—a far easier charge to 'prove' than soliciting—or picking on individual prostitutes repeatedly, are particularly unjust.

It is accepted as a commonplace that the vice-squad will set up arrests. Susan describes typical police procedure—"There are usually two in a car posing as clients. One asks you how much, you tell him, then the other one—who may have been hiding in the back—pops up and does you for soliciting." As a defence against this, details of the type of cars used by the vice-squad and the registration numbers are circulated among the pros.

Accounts of individual violence also exist. One of PROS' members describes how she was assaulted by two police officers and made a written complaint, although she did not proceed with a private prosecution. Nevertheless, she was subsequently acquitted—a rare event—of the charge of soliciting brought against her at the time. The cat and mouse nature of the vice-squad's operations is perhaps the most degrading aspect of their work for all concerned. Carol remains deeply impressed by the events surrounding the murder of a local prostitute. "The police gave us all a free run for a month. They didn't arrest any of us on the understanding that we'd pass on any information we got on the attacker. It didn't seem to matter that we might have got killed in the process."

Family and friends

Many prostitutes maintain that the material welfare of their children is *the* reason for their continued involvement in prostitution. "How could I afford to buy them the things they need otherwise? Certainly not on Social Security." "My main aim is to get a good home together for the kids." Because of this they bitterly resent suggestions that women are bound to be bad mothers simply because they are prostitutes.

The real dilemma concerning children is their possible feelings of shame or rejection when they learn about their mother's involvement in prostitution. Some prostitutes like Carol, have made sure that her children understand how she earns her money, as protection against them hearing from a third party. Another member of PROS, Peggy, could not bring herself to tell her son face to face so she put what she had to say to him on tape.

Whether or not husbands, cohabitees and boyfriends generally resent the nature of a prostitute's work with clients is impossible to say. The stigma that accompanies the job has the most depressing effect on personal relations. The general experience is that people away from the world of prostitution accept prostitutes on their own terms until they find out what they do.

The campaign so far

PROS' work during the last year has produced two critical developments—a public voice for street prostitutes and sympathy and support from other groups.

Supporters' networks have been established in Birmingham, Sheffield, Wolverhampton, Leamington and Coventry. Others are starting to form in London and Leicester. Lawyers, MPs, social workers and active members of the women's movement are among those who have joined prostitutes on PROS' supporters' register. The campaign to date has also ranged from lobbying MPs, producing bulletins, giving press interviews, to broadcasting and speaking at meetings all over the country. Dignified demonstrations are planned. Links have also been made with prostitutes organising abroad as in COYOTE in San Francisco which has a membership running into thousands and has been campaigning for several years for decriminalisation.

The most striking development has involved the women's movement. When PROS began it was met with frank hostility on the part of members of the women's movement. They saw prostitutes as simply pandering to male desires for sex objects. But since a sympathetic article appeared in *Spare Rib* 56 PROS has been contacted by women's groups from all over the country. Feminists have come to identify with street prostitutes on two counts—first as belonging to a victimised female minority—secondly, as part of a vast group of women who are single parents, with dependent children, up against low earnings or living at subsistence levels.

Currently PROS is concentrating on its campaign to end imprisonment. This seems the most likely of its aims to be achieved in the short term—given the general climate of concern about unnecessary prison sentences. For this PROS are also starting to gain the support of some magistrates who are tired of being the people who actually have to pass sentences of imprisonment on prostitutes.

PROS' long term goals are defined by Susan, "I joined PROS because it's wrong if prostitutes can't stand up and say what they want to say: they should also be able to say I'm a prostitute and not be looked down on."

PROS has a lot of work to do.

Eileen McLeod

1 Working Party on Vagrancy & Street Offences, Working Paper 1974, HMSO.

* COYOTE—Cast Off Your Old Tired Ethics.

PROS: Contact c/o Peace Centre, Moor Street, Birmingham 4.

SHORT LIST

INFORMATION TO ANNY BRACKX
27 CLERKENWELL CLOSE
LONDON EC1

TALKS AND CONFERENCES

New Directions in Feminist History
31 March. 7.30 Feminist History Group talk at the Women's Research and Resources Centre, 27 Clerkenwell Close, EC1. Report from the Maryland conference and discussion of how the FHG should work. Women only.

The Sociology of Culture
1-4 April. British Sociological Association conference at Sussex University, including feminist sessions and events. Details from the BSA, 13 Endsleigh St, London WC1 or from Michele Barrett (01-800 8367).

Women and Industrial Tribunals
3 April. 6.00 Fawcett Society Hall at the Centre for Environmental Studies, 62 Chandos Place, London WC2. Speaker Pat Turner (GMWU). Details from the Fawcett Society 01-828 1981 (mornings).

Women's Liberation National Conference
7-9 April. At Ladywood School, Birmingham. Proposed structure: no skills workshops; women should be allocated to the same workshop for the whole conference, workshops should be vaguely on the same theme, falling under three headings–how do we oppress each other, how can we campaign against the oppression of women within society, how do we come together; there should be a separate meeting on Friday night for women new to the movement, and a space for women feeling overwhelmed; only one plenary on Sunday afternoon; advance registration and circulation of papers encouraged; different groups/regions should volunteer to do chores; creches organised on a regional basis; reduced conference fee for non-earners, and subsidised fares for women living far from Birmingham. Contact the Birmingham Women's Centre, 76 Brighton Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12 or ring Wires (0904-35471) for latest details of registration fees, pooled fare arrangements, and papers.

Women's Devolution
"What impact will the new Scottish Assembly have on women in Scotland? Will it signal a triumph for a dour and masculine presbyterianism, or will it be an opportunity for progressive reform?"
8 April. Meeting 1.30-5.00 at Cannonball House, Castlehill, Edinburgh, on abortion, contraception and maternity services, organised by Scottish NCCL, Edinburgh Campaign for Legal and Financial Independence, and the East of Scotland WEA. Creche. Adm 50p. Details from 041-332 5960 or 031-661 7315.

Imperialism and Motherhood
14 April. 7.30 Feminist History Group talk at the WRRC as above. Speaker Anna Davin. Women only.

Asian Women in Britain
18 April (postponed from 28 March). 6.30 discussion at the Institute of Race Relations, 247/249 Pentonville Rd, London N1 (01-837 0041), led by Amrit Wilson.

Pregnancy, Maternity Rights and the Trade Unions
22 April. 9.30-5.00 NCCL conference at the Poly of Central London, 115 New Cavendish St, London W1. The conference is designed to "examine statutory maternity provisions; pass on the experience of union negotiators, who have won better agreements at work; discuss the relevance to trade unions of policies on abortion which give women a real freedom of choice". Trade union and NCCL speakers. Adm £4.50 incl lunch, coffee and tea, and two NCCL publications. Creche 40p per child. Details from NCCL, 186 King's Cross Road, London WC1 (01-278 4575).

York Conference on Ireland
22 April. 9.30-6.00 at Swarthmore Centre, 3 Woodhouse Sq, Leeds 3. Workshops on women in Ireland, the republican movement, tactics and propaganda . . . Evening social, Creche. Bring sleeping bag. Adm 60p (35p wageless). Details from UTOM, 182 Upper St, N1.

Girls' Conference
23 April. 2.00-10.00 event for young women between 11 and 21, at Markhouse Youth Centre, Markhouse Rd, London E17. Theme: the role of women in a changing society and the changing expectations women have of their role. Stalls, discussion groups, video, exhibitions, Women's Theatre Group, and Jam Today in the evening. Food available. Details from Valerie Carpenter (01-520 2434).

Marxist Theory and Feminist History
28 April. 7.30 Feminist History Group talk at the WRRC as above. Speaker Barbara Taylor. Women only.

Women and Housing Co-ops
29 April. 10.30 meeting at Camden Women's Centre, Rosslyn Lodge, Lyndhurst Rd, London NW3, to discuss involvement in co-ops, forming one, women's/children's housing needs . . . Further suggestions welcome (01-221 1222). Creche. Bring your own lunch.

Sexism and Feminism
29/30 April. Mixed teach-in at York University. Workshops on marriage and the family, women in the unions, wages for housework, sexism in language, children's literature, radical feminism, women and education, pregnancy, health . . . Accommodation, creche available. Details from the Women's Liberation Group c/o Students Union, Goodriche College, University of York, Heslington, York.

Contraception and Pregnancy Testing
Mid-May. Conference to discuss the politics of pregnancy testing, ways to improve the NHS. Contact Irene McMorland, 16 Clare St, Cambridge (0223-311665) with ideas, and topics.

CAMPAIGNS

Abortion

National Abortion Campaign Conference
29/30 April. In Sheffield, to discuss politics and practice of NAC, as well as what to do next. Details from NAC, 30 Camden Rd, London NW1 (01-485 4303).

Design a NAC Badge Competition. They must be 1¾ or 2¼ inches in diameter. Use one or two colours, or three colours including white. Include 'National Abortion Campaign' or 'NAC' and at least one of these slogans: free abortion on demand, a woman's right to choose, no return to back-street abortion, day care abortion clinics now, no forced sterilisation. Entries by the end of March to NAC, as above.

Nurses for a Woman's Right to Choose. Nurses can play a vital part in the campaign for adequate day care abortion facilities. "We can fight the cutbacks in our hospitals and expose anti-abortionist doctors and gynaecologists. Contact Nurses for a Woman's Right to Choose Group via Alex Webber, 119 Mackintosh Place, Cardiff (0222 30183).

Fighting Sexism
1 April. 3.00 Affirm meeting at A Woman's Place, 42 Earlham Street, London WC2 (and every other Sat thereafter), to discuss ways of fighting sexist images of women. 'This degrades women' stickers are available at 10p + 10p postage for 10 from Affirm c/o A Woman's Place, as above. Also if you are incensed with the 'juicy fruity . . . ' ads, the patriarchs responsible for them are Wells (Drinks), Tenbury Wells, Worcester; the ad agency is Rodway-Smith Advertising, Blackboy Yard, West Wycombe, Bucks.

Reclaim the Night in Coventry
15 April. 8.30-9.30 meet at Lanchester Poly Student Union (opp. Cathedral). Contact LPSU Women's Group (0203 21167) for transport. All women welcome.

PROJECTS

Wires
Wires, the Women's Liberation Movement National Information and Newsletter service, is updating its information on all women's liberation groups and their activities in the country. We have sent individual questionnaires to most of the groups we know of (and have tried to cover the London groups via A Woman's Place newsletter), but we are sure that this isn't adequate, and that there must be groups that we don't have recorded in our files. So, if you belong to a group, or have connections with one (health, consciousness-raising, art, lesbian, campaigning, etc), please write to us for a questionnaire at 32 Parliament St, York.

Parents and Children
Nell Dunn's editing a book about the relationships of parents and children from different social and cultural backgrounds. She wants to explore expectations on various levels from financial to emotional including sexual. Anyone who is interested in sharing their experiences about fathers, mothers, daughters and sons write to Nell Dunn, 34 Homead Rd, SW6.

Black Women–Legal Services in London
"I am undertaking an inquiry into the legal services provided for black women within the London area . . . I would like to contact black women who are able to furnish me with details about any of the legal services they have used and are familiar with and can recommend, as well as legal personnel whose clientele consists mainly of black women . . . "Do agencies consider black women's problems in their contact with the English legal system? Are their problems adequately dealt with? Are they offered enough support? Send your information/experience to Shirley Brathwaite, c/o Rights of Women, 2 St Paul's Rd, N1 (01-359 6656).

FUN AND MUSIC

Irishwomen United Benefit
14 April. 8.00-12.00 at Waterloo

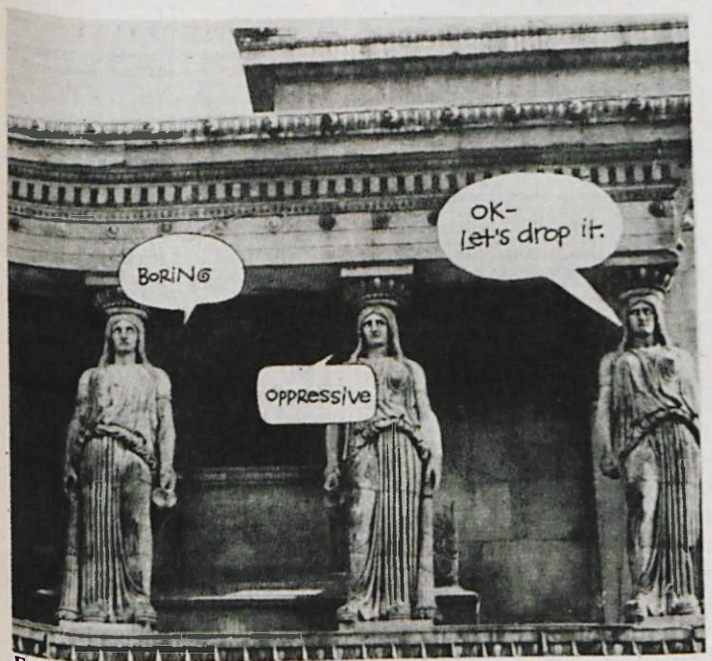
Action Centre, 14 Baylis Rd, London SE1, to help pay printers' bills and open a women's centre in Dublin. With Clapperclaw, Pansy's disco, food, drink. Adm 80p (50p claimants). Women only.

Afro-Jazz
14 April. 8.00 concert at the Africa Centre, 38 King St, London WC2 (01 836 1973). With Terry Quaye and Moonspirit. Adm £1.

Scottish Women's Liberation Carnival
June. In Edinburgh. Needed: women with silly traits/skills for workshops like cowbuilding (?), roller-skating, yoga, writing, photography, swearing, self-exam, pantomime, music . . . Contact the Women's Liberation Workshop, 160 Fountain Bridge, Edinburgh (031 554 6318).

ART

Art of Resistance
15 March-1 April. Talks and events at the Air Gallery, Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC1. The patchwork pictures described in *SR* 63 are part of a documentary exhibition of art and resistance in Chile.



From *Women's Report* Sept-Oct '75

Frances Draper
Until 8 April. 11.00-6.00 exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Women's Arts Alliance, Cambridge Terrace Mews, London NW1 (01-935 1891).

Studying Art
"As a woman artist, I often feel the need to discuss my work with somebody of my own sex, as the lecturers tend to be chauvinistic and talk to me as if addressing a child, and see my work as a fleeting fancy for self-amusement." In September Sue Wilton will be holding an exhibition at the Women's Arts Alliance, as above, examining with retrospective artifacts the way education has affected her as an artist, a person and as a woman. She wants women who have been thinking along the same lines to contact her at Aberdare Lodge, 64 Aberdare Gardens, London NW6.

Photography
"I'm interested in meeting and finding women in the Manchester area who want to share photographic art skills, and equipment and/or to work towards joint projects and exhibitions. I want to discuss with other women how best to use these skills (production of postcards/calendars/posters/exhibitions dealing with feminist issues)." If you're interested contact Diane 'Hank' Olson (061-224 6069 or 061-236 3112).

PLAYS AND FILMS

Women's Week in London's East End
10 April. *She Asked For It* by Counteract
12 April. *Miss & Mrs* and *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* (films).
13 April. *In Our Own Way* by the Women's Theatre Group. 8.00 at Dame Colet House, Ben Jonson Rd, London E1.
14 April. Benefit with women's bands 8.00-1.00 at St Hilda's East, 18 Club Row, London E2.
15 April. *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (film). Ring 01-790 0163 or 01-515 1174 if you want to help/contribute or for details of time and place.

PUBLICATIONS

Onlywomen Press
A women's liberation publishing and printing group for, by and of women is compiling an anthology of current radical feminist thought/writing and an anthology of British feminist poetry. 'We would like contributions to both these projects and also welcome other manuscripts. Are you writing? Do you know of articles or poems we could use? If so, please let us know (enclose SAE with manuscript).' Onlywomen Press, c/o 40 St Lawrence Terrace, W10.

Virago Handbook One—For Widows
In Britain there are over 3 million widows. Although most widows are over 60, widowhood is increasingly common among women who are under 60. 15% of women are widows and yet, (surprise, surprise) our Welfare State does not face up either to this fact or its consequences. For example, a widow receives no sickness or unemployment benefit, gets no pension if she is under 40, and is taxed as a single woman regardless of responsibilities. This handbook provides a detailed guide to enable a widow to cope with all the legal, practical and financial problems that she will face at what is probably a time of emotional crisis. The price of the handbook may well prevent it reaching those who it could most help. Written by June Hemer and Ann Stanyer, it's available at £1.25 + postage from Virago, 5 Wardour St, London W1.

Jenny Earle (for ROW)

Virago Handbook Two—Talking to your Doctor
The handbook aims firstly "to help women to decide when they should visit the doctor by giving them basic information about the reproductive and sexual functions of their bodies . . . and secondly to improve the relationship between a woman and her doctor . . . " Available at £1 + postage from Virago as above.

War on Rape
The Melbourne (Australia) Women Against Rape Collective have campaigned and worked together in a rape crisis centre since 1974. They've collected their experiences in this booklet which situates rape within a commodity producing society (if you cannot bargain for it or buy it, why not steal it). But it's mainly a survival guide outlining how to avoid being raped, what to do when you are, how to protect and defend yourself, how to cope with the law (in Melbourne) and what medical care women need when they have been violated. Available at 2 dollars (Austr.) + postage from Women Against Rape, 165 Latrobe St, Melbourne, Vic 3000.

*** Ways & Means**
A directory of alternative information, divided into three sections: general sources (specialised libraries, publications/publishers by region, organisations), education (counter courses, free schools, community projects, alternative prospectuses), work (worker/food co-ops, technology, training, retraining, claimings). Useful. 80p + postage (60p + postage for poor individuals), from NUS (SCANUS), 302 Pentonville Rd, London N1.

Radical Education Books
The Corner House Bookshop have produced a catalogue of "journals, pamphlets and magazines, theories and practical quotes, which present radical and alternative views of education and which are not readily available in any one other place". 20p + postage (the 20p will be refunded on the first mail order) from the Bookshop, 14 Endell St, London WC2.

Abortion Internationally
"We will not tolerate laws that degrade, mutilate and murder women. The struggle will be long and difficult and we must wage it as long as any woman, anywhere, is denied the right to control her own body." A NAC pamphlet giving a round up of what sisters all over the world (Chile, Eastern Europe and USSR, China, Bangladesh, India, Japan, USA, Italy) are up against if they want to be bosses of their bellies. Available at 30p + postage from NAC as above.

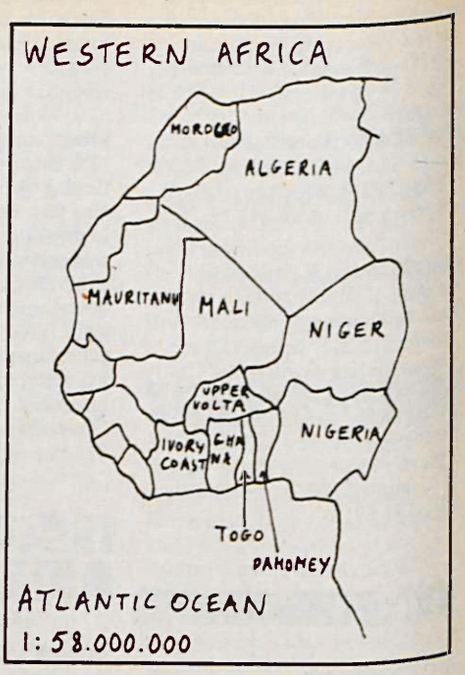
Donna
The pilot issue of this international bulletin is now out. "The task of the editorial staff will be to gather, translate and spread informative material from groups and individual women, which is on the theme of defending our rights as women." It is in four languages and this issue has articles on abortion in England, a statement by the Latin American Women's Group, and one urging women to celebrate international Women's Day. Could be interesting but this number is badly translated. Articles, comments, to Donna, CISAI, Via Massarenti 190, Bologna, Italia.

Working Class Women's Liberation Newsletter
"Because we are dissatisfied with middle class feminist publications we have started our own newsletter. The first issue has been put together by Judy and Liz; the second will be done by Denise and Evelyn. 20p + postage each or subscribe (£1 for six issues). Contact Evelyn, 43 Eastwell House, Weston St, London SE1.

Countrywomen
Newsletter for feminists living in the country, trying to break down the isolation of rural life. New subs (£1 for four issues), donations, letters and articles for the next issue should be sent to Countrywomen Newsletter, c/o Wendy and Tricia, 1 Higher Comberoy Farm Cottage, Westwood, Bradclyst, Exeter, Devon.

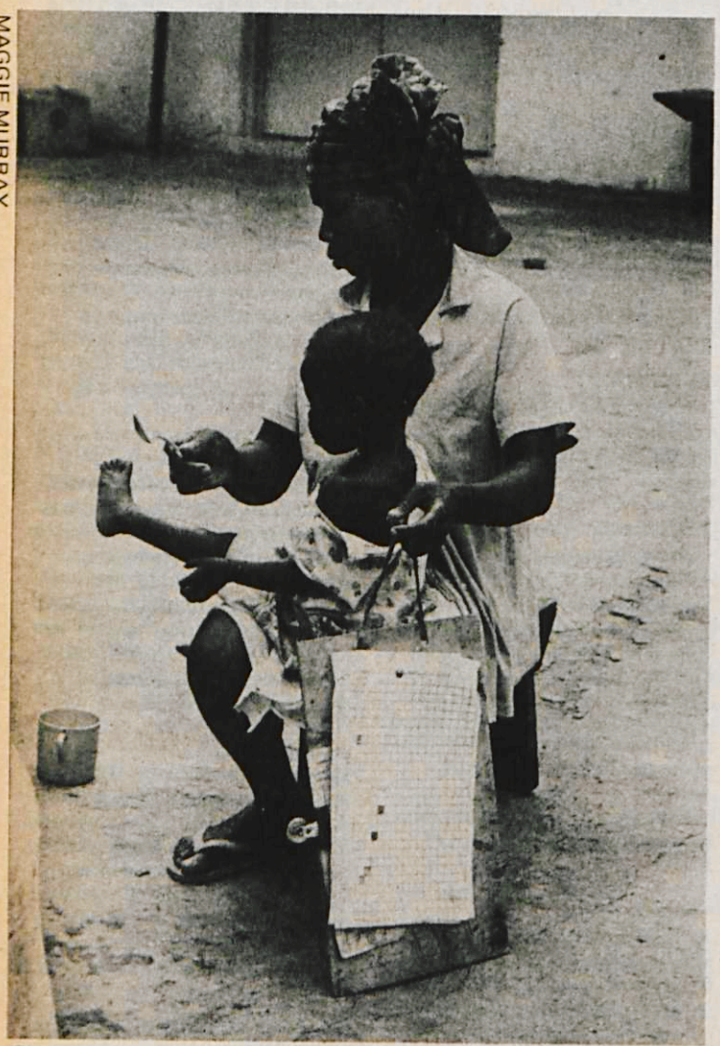
** Indicates publications are available from the Publication Distribution Co-op, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.*

Capital: Ouagadougou
Population: 5.8 million
Major export: cotton
Staple food: millet, sorghum
Principal feature: One of the Sahel countries, with recurring drought and famine. National growth rate negative, 1960-1974.



Witches and Midwives in Upper Volta

Barbara Rogers has recently visited five African countries. As a researcher in Development Studies she's talked with village women to learn about their lives, work and the difficulties they come up against. Health poses some of the biggest problems.



MAGGIE MURRAY

Ghana: woman and child at a Nutrition Training Centre

Women have the same health problems in Africa as here—only more so. In many of the booming cities you will find long queues of poor women outside the hospitals with babies on their backs, waiting for hours to try and get contraceptive advice. Once there, they are all too often given the most superficial examination, told brusquely which method to use, and pushed out of the door to make room for the next. No time for questions, for making sure they understand, for consideration of side effects, for discussion of alternative methods.

From Lusaka to Abidjan, the problem is the same. Too many women wanting help, not enough staff or other resources to cope with them. To the men, it is a non-problem. While women are concerned about their health, about feeding their children, about the quality of life for the whole family, male planners are talking only in terms of statistics. We need more people, they so often say.

Maternal mortality in childbirth is at horrendous levels, with the risks increasing with every pregnancy. All too often, the woman who dies leaves a large family of small children behind. Small wonder that they seek contraception, however inadequate the service available; and that when this fails or, more often, is simply unavailable, they turn to abortion as the only way out. Until recently, this issue has been swept under a rug; however, in Zambia it has recently been recognised in a confidential United Nations report as one of the biggest public health problems (which is saying a lot). In Abidjan (Ivory Coast), one of the biggest cities along the West African coast, the mortality and injury caused by unskilled abortion is being raised for the first time not by the authorities but by the government financed women's and youth organisations.

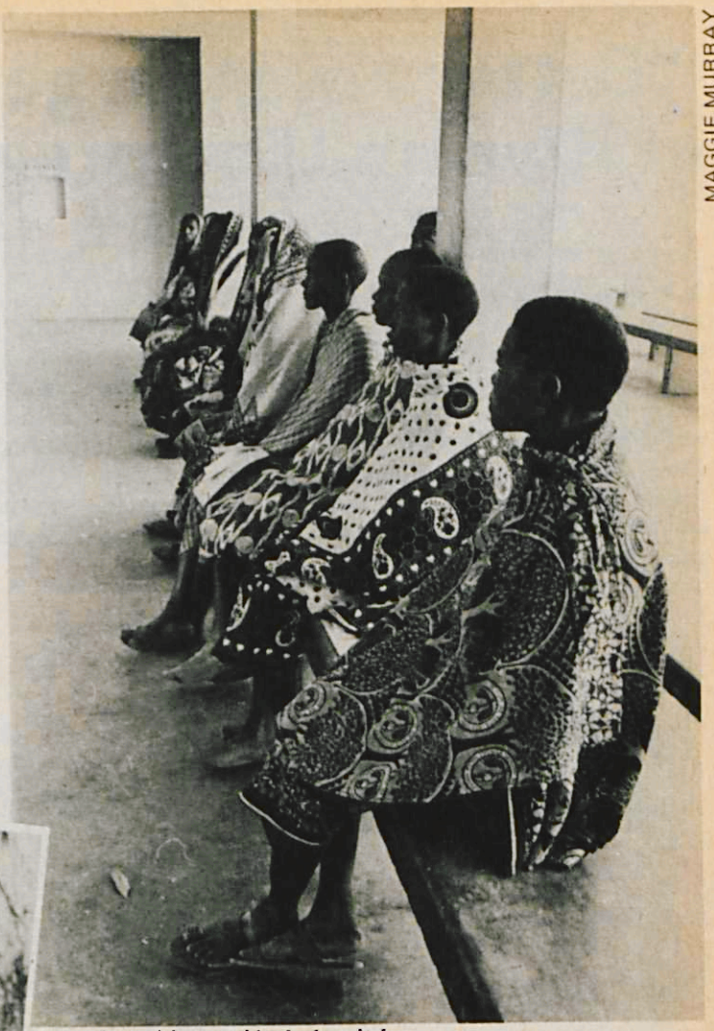
Much of the problem in the cities is caused by the loss of traditional medical skills which have their roots in the countryside of Africa. Those 'witch-doctors' so heartily despised by the missionaries of Europe were in fact highly skilled women and men who used a combination of herbal and other medicines, and who showed great skill in treating psychological problems to deal with diseases endemic in their particular area. The women often had secret processes for contraception, induced menstruation and abortion, which were passed on through their secret societ-

ies, and initiaton procedures, from which men were rigorously excluded. Now, with a combination of colonial repression of women's secret societies, the introduction of foreign (male) doctors as the ultimate in medical care, and the outlawing of abortion in all African countries, many of the traditional practices are falling into disuse, and the old skills lost. It is a process sadly familiar from recent research on the repression of wise women, midwives and other traditional healers in Europe.

In Africa, though, the process may yet be reversible. It is so inconceivable for the multiple health problems of Africans to be treated by modern medicine, focused on a few inadequate hospitals, that even that bastion of the medical profession, the World Health Organisation, has had to come to terms with traditional medicine. Not so many years ago, the WHO had almost no contraception programmes, and wanted doctors to have a monopoly of all prescriptions for the pill and the loop. Now, it has been forced by the radicals inside and outside its ranks to adopt the new strategy of 'Primary Health Care'.

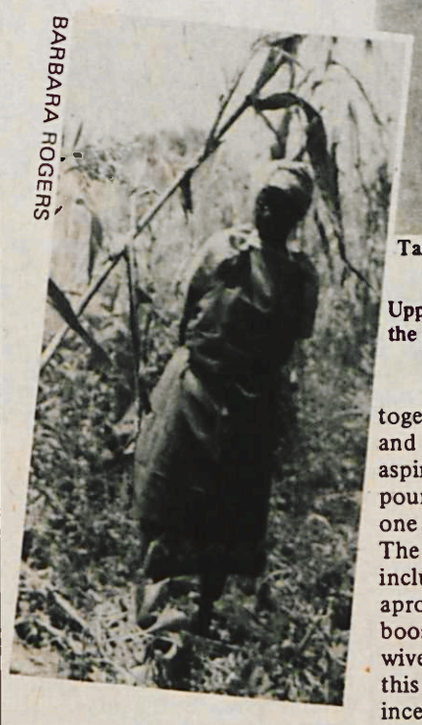
To see what this is in practice, we can look at the case of Upper Volta, one of the world's poorest countries. Its existing health-care network, set up by the French, is very much based on (French) doctors working in the main towns, trying to run hospitals without the network of auxiliary staff (nurses, physiotherapists, radiologists, administrators, social workers) who in fact are the backbone of a properly functioning hospital. In the rural areas, there is practically no medical or dental service whatever. There is no prospect of increasing the health budget very much, and even if it could be doubled or trebled this would bring medical services no closer to the vast majority of the population.

One of the first tasks in the WHO's Primary Health Care project, therefore, is to identify and mobilise the resources available in the traditional sector, represented in every village by someone with special knowledge and experience. Invariably, the obvious choice is the village midwife, an older woman with considerable experience of the problems arising in pregnancy, childbirth and early infancy. In some cases, their skills go far beyond this: even many educated people, including a number of the long-established Europeans there, would rather go to these traditional healers for certain diseases than to a French-style hospital. The disease most frequently mentioned in this respect is hepatitis (jaundice), a problem greatly feared by foreigners in the country because western medicine has no proper treatment for it, and contracting it often means going home for a long period of illness. Traditional healers, on the other hand, are reputed to have specific remedies for hepatitis. A gradually dawning



MAGGIE MURRAY

Tanzania: waiting outside the hospital



BARBARA ROGERS

Upper Volta: midwife wearing the prestigious green apron.

realisation that perhaps *they* might have something to teach *us* has led to some attempts at proper research on the nature of drugs and other treatment used by traditional healers using local plants and other resources.

At the same time, there is much to be gained from communication in the other direction: training village midwives, for example, in elementary hygiene and the prevention of infection. It is estimated that thousands of women could be saved yearly if the midwives have sterile razor-blades for cutting the umbilical cord, for example. These are therefore an important part of the kit being provided to the midwives, together with sterile bandages and a few basic drugs such as aspirin and anti-malarial compounds, after a brief training of one month at a local centre. The training and equipment—including a much-prized green apron—also help enormously to boost the prestige of the midwives in their own villages, and this constitutes an important incentive for participation in the scheme where it is beginning to be available. The potential for innovation is impressive: in several villages in the Po area which I visited, all the women were proud to demonstrate their home-made water filters, which had been introduced by the midwives after their training course, and the villagers agreed that using these filters had contributed substantially to a reduction of certain intestinal problems which had been caused by water-borne parasites.

This programme of Primary Health Care has a very long way to go, being still in its preliminary stages. Ultimately, perhaps by the year 2000, a network of 400 Centres de Santé et de Promotion Sociale (rural health centres) may be set up to which the village people can relate. Today only about 10% of the population is covered by modern health care of any kind.

The programme Director, a Yugoslav woman named Mrs Markovic, is a nurse. She is one of the rare United Nations project directors who is a woman, and is also perhaps one of the most dedicated to her job. She sees the task of reaching the entire population of Upper Volta as something which, despite the enormous problems, simply has to be achieved; failure is unthinkable. In formerly French-ruled Africa, most of the nurses are men, and women are only ever in charge of maternity clinics or pediatric wards. Taking responsibility back to the villages, she feels, can provide something of direct and immediate benefit to women both as workers and as beneficiaries. In a country constantly on the verge of famine and accompanying epidemics of disease, a community responsibility for health means the difference between life and death for many. But the issues remain strikingly similar to our own. ●

"Better a woman gets cancer in 30 years than pregnant now"

DEPO PROVERA IN USE

In *Spare Rib* 42 & 47 we reported on the side effects of the contraceptive injection Depo Provera: continual bleeding or no periods at all, dizziness, sickness, tiredness, aches and pains and, in the long term, increased risk of cancer, permanent sterility, diabetes and damage to the foetus if the drug is taken during pregnancy. DP is not yet licensed for general use in Britain and has been banned in the USA. Now the East London Women's Health Group have discovered that it is being used not only in the Third World and in Glasgow (where it was originally tested in this country) but also in the East End of London. They are now launching a campaign against the use of the drug, against the issuing of a general licence for use here and they are asking other women's groups to start investigations in their areas to find out how widespread the use of DP actually is. Health group member *Lyn Harne* writes:



CHRISTINE ROCHE

In this country, Depo-Provera is only licensed officially for women who have had Rubella (German Measles) injections to ensure that they don't get pregnant until the effect of the injection wears off. It can also be given to women whose husbands have undergone vasectomy and are waiting for it to take effect. On a short term basis it may be offered to women who are breast feeding or as a stop-gap measure after birth or abortion to women who have not yet decided on their method of contraception.

However, any doctor may prescribe DP providing they take full responsibility for its use (so that, in theory, if anything went wrong *they* could be sued rather than the drug company). In fact, the drug is being used in Family Planning clinics in Tower Hamlets and Hackney and also at the London Hospital where it is prescribed to women considered 'unreliable contraceptive users'. This category is very wide. It ranges from women who have had two abortions to Asian women whose husbands disapprove of them using contraception and encompasses those who suffer from bad housing, 'too many' children or unemployment. In other words it is considered the ideal contraceptive for the poor woman, black or white.

It is particularly disturbing that DP is sometimes offered alongside abortion at the Mile End day-care abortion clinic, a facility fought for by local feminists. In 1976, 2% of women using the clinic were given the drug. One woman who refused it said that "It was implied that I should take DP because I was irresponsible for having had two abortions."

In the clinics, a very brief leaflet is given to women taking DP saying that they may experience 'spotting' during the first ten weeks of use, but the really unpleasant side effects are not mentioned. One woman said: "I was supposed to have just one injection but they gave me two which meant they lasted for six months. One of the worst effects was tiredness. I was tired for nearly the whole of six months. Then I didn't get any periods but I kept on getting cramps as if my period was coming on. I got dizzy and lost two stone in weight. I would never take it again."

Far from being a short term solution to resolve a woman's 'social circumstances' as some doctors would see it, the effects of DP make the situation worse by undermining the woman's health as well. Doctors justify this with the moral argument that it is better for the woman not to get pregnant, even at a cost to her health. They feel they are protecting a woman from herself. As one health visitor put it: "Better a woman gets cancer in 30 years time than gets pregnant now."

We have tried to gather information about how much the drug is being used, talking initially to women who have been given it. From this information we have had articles printed in local newspapers about DP and its side effects, challenged doctors in clinics about why they use it and are producing a leaflet with Asian women in the area. Finding the information has been difficult and we are very concerned that there is no follow-up research being done on women using DP in East London.

A campaign against the use of DP is particularly urgent now because the FPA are applying to get the drug licensed for general use. We feel that there is no justification for the use of DP and as an injectable contraceptive it is wide open to abuse by doctors and the state for population control. ■

Contact E. London Health Group c/o 116 Albion Drive, E8.

ABORTION Advice?

TELEPHONE

Birmingham	021-643 1461
Bournemouth	02016 77720
Brighton	0273 509726
Cardiff	0222 372389
Chester	0244 27113
Glasgow	041 204 1832
Leeds	0532 443861
Liverpool	051 227 3721
London	01 222 0985
Manchester	061 236 7777
Sheffield	0742 738326

BPAS Charitable Trust
for Pregnancy Testing, Abortion and Sterilisations.
Operations arranged after medical consultation,
at our own non-profit clinics.

Closing Down Clinics

"Close all our Family Planning Clinics? They must be joking! Who do they think they are?" This was a characteristic response from women in Brighton shopping centres as they stopped to sign the petition to save the East Sussex Family Planning Clinics (FPCs). The District Management Team's latest proposal to 'save money' was received by local women with a mixture of anger and disbelief, following, as it did, an attempt to close Brighton Women's Hospital last autumn.

The Brighton health bureaucracy has been taken aback by the militancy of local people on these cuts. At a meeting last November a surprised Community Health Council—sup-

ITALY – ABORTION CRISIS

Abortion is again at issue within the Italian Women's Liberation Movement after a period of stagnation caused by the disillusionment and confusion which followed the defeat of the Abortion Bill in June 1977.

Manuela Lombardo *reports:*



DANIELA COLOMBO

"A law that doesn't kill us! Free abortion now!"–Italian abortion demo

Feminists feel that it's time to reconsider the strategy of the abortion movement, especially because a Catholic 'Movement for Life' has now collected about two million signatures to present a bill for "a right to life" in the Senate. The most striking clauses are 1) abortion is a crime in all circumstances and 2) the Government should provide centres where doctors and social workers could look after a pregnant woman and "save her reputation". In the "extreme" case of a woman deciding not to keep the child, adoption could be arranged before its birth.

In response to this threat the women's movement is determined to settle its differences. The basic disagreement before the defeat of the pro-abortion bill was that many feminists supported the rather restricted law because at least it would legalise abortion, while those working in CISA, linked with the Radical Party, feared that women would still not be able to get an abortion because of the complications of getting permission from two doctors.

In January and February three national meetings were called to discuss the current situation and unite the various groups active in the abortion campaign. On 28 and 29 January 2,000 feminists attended a meeting in Rome. It was agreed that the lesson to be learnt from the defeat was that the women's movement could not leave such an issue in the hands of any political party–everyone felt betrayed even by the left wing ones. Indeed the MLD, a women's group originally linked with the Radical Party, has now severed its connection with it.

The position of the self-help abortion groups was also discussed. The groups have complained about the lack of support from the rest of the women's movement because of disagreement on the critical question–does self-help mean that women are going to take the responsibility of doing abortions and perhaps come to be used just as a service by other women? Isn't the movement's aim to impose the obligation on public institutions to provide adequate abortion facilities? Women from self-help groups explained that they do want public institutions to take responsibility, but that the practice of self-help is a way of providing models of alternative medicine–and of rediscovering sexuality and control over our own bodies.

Many Italian feminists feel the need to widen the abortion fight to include challenging views of sexuality, motherhood and the family.

On February 4 a conference on abortion legislation was organised by the Radical Party, but feminists were not informed about it, and it was a fiasco. Once again women have realised how different parties try to use or drop them for their own interests.

On International Women's Day feminists are holding a demonstration for abortion, using their own tactics–giving out parsley, a traditional abortifacient, and vouchers for one free abortion if you're a member of the Communist Party–to suggest how that party could make up for its hesitancy in supporting women's right to abortion in the past.■

posedly 'our voice' in the Health Service–was literally deprived of speech by a furious audience who left it in no doubt as to public feeling on the proposed closure of the Women's Hospital. More recently, members of the East Sussex Area Health Authority had to pass through a crowd of 200 people to get into *their* monthly meeting. The slogan being chanted was "Sixteen thousand people say–Family Planning Clinics stay!"

We don't yet know the outcome of this particular campaign. It now seems as though a few but not all FPC sessions could be cut. The Health Authority proposal is to send women to their GPs instead of to the clinics. Most women we talked to locally criticised this strongly: "GPs don't have enough time to talk to you as it is"; "Lots of women can't go to their GPs–not all doctors are sympathetic"; "GPs don't know as much about Family Planning as the clinic does".

A clinic service is actually *cheaper* than a GP service–but local authorities don't have to pay GPs: the money comes directly from the central government, so this is a way of cutting corners on the local budget.

The Brighton situation is part of a national threat to contraceptive services. How many women know that since the NHS took over all the FPA's clinics (over 1,000 of them) in 1974-76, the service provided has *declined*–both in scope and in quality? Six Health Authorities have reduced sessions or closed clinics since 1975. Only one has advertised expansion.

Provision is very uneven throughout the country. In some areas there are waiting lists of ten weeks, and clinics ▶

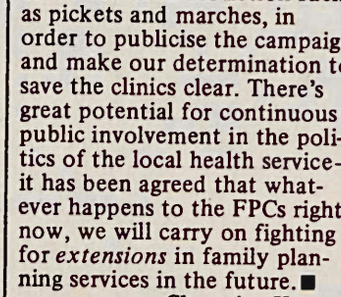
are very crowded.

Kingston and Richmond area clinics were closed last year, and patients have been bussed elsewhere. In Cambridgeshire, services have been 'rationalised'—ie *cut*. In Oxfordshire similar proposals have been made to those in Brighton—to use GPs not clinics. And in Peterborough, the AHA is trying to close down a supposedly 'under-used' clinic in an immigrant area: this facility has the time to deal with language and cultural difficulties, is close to Asian women's homes and needs far more publicity, not closure.

Most GPs offer contraceptive services—but 1/3 of them provide a service only for their own patients, and only 1/4 know how to fit IUDs. So women must have the choice between going to a GP or a clinic, depending on their needs. Certainly FPCs provide the basis for offering a comprehensive service to everyone, but these possibilities aren't being implemented. *Some* clinics have facilities for psychosexual counselling, menopausal sessions, subfertility investigations—and sterilisations. But by 1977, 17 AHAs still didn't provide sterilisations as a family planning service. Waiting lists for vasectomies are up to 10 months in some areas—meanwhile, in Fife last year the vasectomy programme was cut "due to increased demand"!

More local campaigns around the provision of contraception are much needed. In Brighton, the fight to save the FPCs has brought together doctors, nurses and clinic workers, patients, women's groups, other political groups and community associations. Discussions on tactics have been fascinating! From being prepared to write letters and take petitions round, many people have begun to see the need for action such as pickets and marches, in order to publicise the campaign and make our determination to save the clinics clear. There's great potential for continuous public involvement in the politics of the local health service—it has been agreed that whatever happens to the FPCs right now, we will carry on fighting for *extensions* in family planning services in the future. ■

Charmian Kenner



One woman's crisis with the cuts . . .

About 18 months ago I detected a lump in my right breast, and my doctor said I had mastitis (a non-malignant condition). I wasn't too convinced this explained it so I went to a well-woman clinic who said I had lumpy breasts. The lump grew, so I went to an FPA clinic who said I had granular breasts. It grew. So I went to another well woman clinic, this time at the Royal Free in Hampstead, London, and they said . . . lumpy breasts.

The months passed, until last November when I urgently felt, this lump is really there, start again. So I *rang* my doctor and said I wanted to go back to the Royal Free, and he said, come up to my surgery. He saw me and said, my goodness, that will have to come out. At the Royal Free well-woman clinic, the very same doctor who saw me before said, yes—a lump, you'll have to see the specialist. Meanwhile I had a breast X-ray (thermograph), and waited three weeks to see the specialist. She examined me very quickly and said it had to come out for analysis. The Royal Free gave me an admission date for February 21.

But by the time Feb 17 had come, I still hadn't had anything in writing from them, so I phoned. Admissions told me the hospital was on red alert, emergency admissions only. I asked why, and they said it was road accidents. So I couldn't go in? Well no, and it could be weeks, for after red alert came yellow alert . . . So I phoned the consultant's secretary, and she said she knew it was awful and couldn't understand why I hadn't been told, but not to worry because they *were* taking in people with cancer. How would they know whether I had cancer until they'd taken out the lump? She agreed it was tough, and said, ring admissions.

Meanwhile I had another lump, same breast, less mobile and therefore even more worrying than the first. So armed with advice from knowledgeable friends, back to the GP who said, this isn't satisfactory, and I said, I want to go the Royal Marsden, they can't be on red alert because they are a specialist hospital. Off I went, was slowly and gently treated, and told the lumps must come out, in about three weeks. They also took some cells, and were careful not to X-ray my breasts again so soon after the last time.

Apparently the red alert at the Royal Free has more to do with staff illness and shortage than road accidents and hypothermia. The cuts affecting the hospital service are making for long waits, insecure appointments, and are no doubt putting countless lives in jeopardy. If like me you are a middle class woman with a phone, a car, friends in the know, and a bit of time to hassle (albeit mildly) you might get somewhere. My mind is on the list of women who never heard from the hospital, still don't know when they're going in, and who just may be the victims of a sloppy diagnosis. ■

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events

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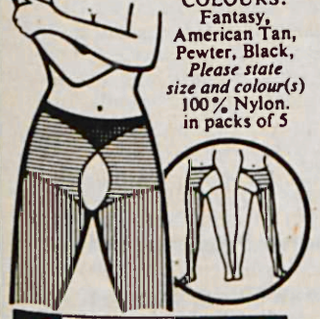
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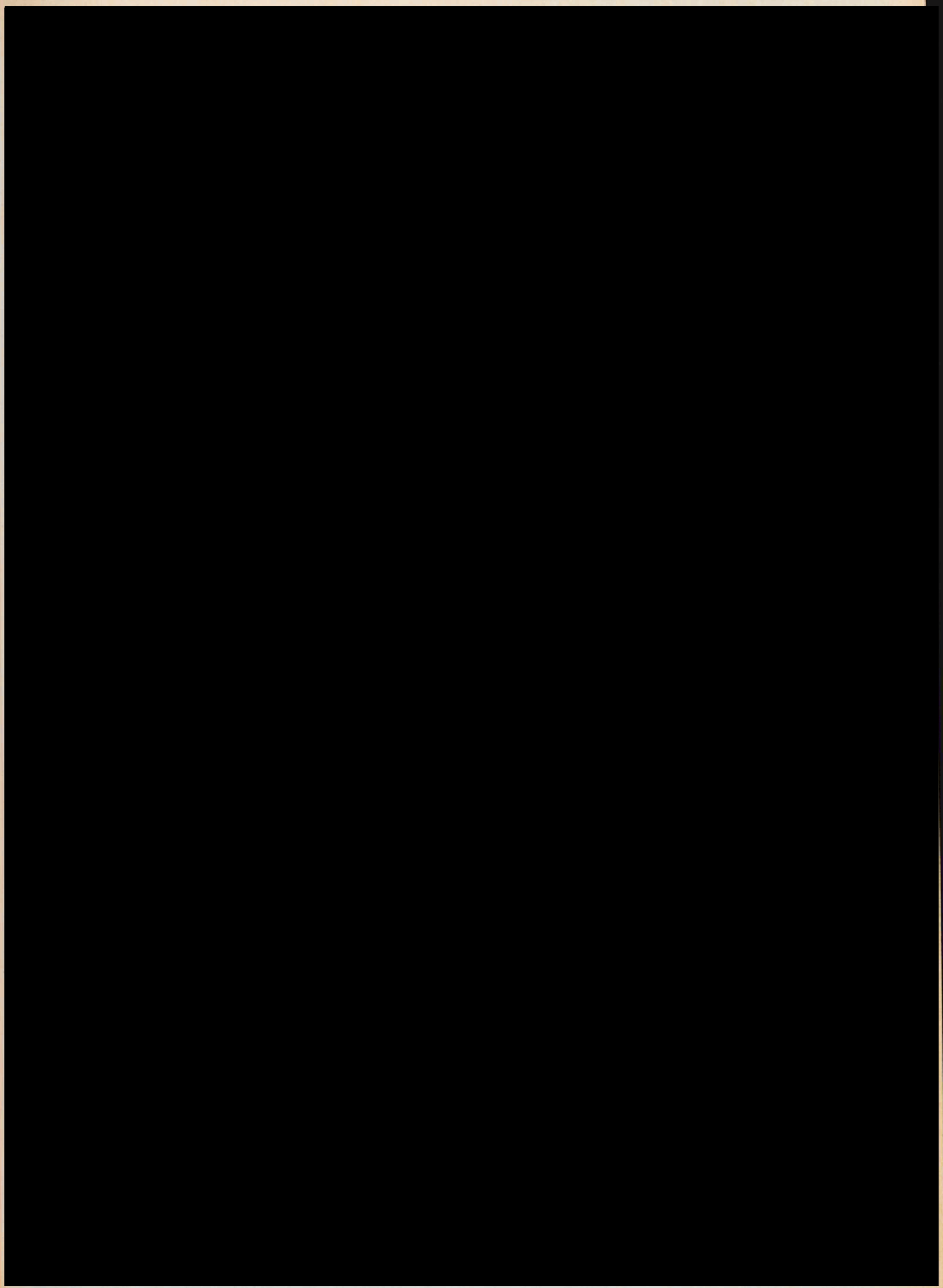
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reviews

music

DON JUAN'S RECKLESS DAUGHTER (WEA)
Joni Mitchell

There's an expansiveness about this new double album—the images are of sea, sky, desert and flight. But at the same time, the mood is introspective, and the ultimate message is one of impasse. Through the wide open spaces she describes so beautifully runs a narrow stream of pain from which it seems she can never escape—the differences between men and women.

On this album she continues to describe for us with yet more refinement and resignation the dilemma of heterosexual love—her theme now for ten years. By her continual references to nature and animals she makes clear her position: that men and women are naturally different. She sees dualism as a fixed cosmic reality: *The spirit talks in spectrums. He talks Mother Earth to Father Sky, self-indulgence to self-denial, man to woman, scales to feathers, you and I.* And within these contradictions, the 'essential' male and female as complementary opposites in nature, she feels most intensely and most impotently. In some songs she sees men as isolated aliens—the ones she names include Jesus, Howard Hughes and Hitler. In others she describes them as mysterious unreachables. It seems that she believes that only in the act of a trusting mutual love can the opposite sexes peel away the outside defences, and exchange their inner selves—*I'll try and keep myself open to you, it gets easier and easier to do. Just like Jericho, Let these walls come tumbling down now. Let them fall right on the ground. Let all these dogs go running free, The wild and the gentle dogs, Kennelled in me.* But the main theme is not of exchange, or of dualities in complement, but of restlessness, of search and finally betrayal: *You give me such pleasure, You bring me such pain, Who left her long black hair, in our bathtub drain?* Nowhere is there any sense of dialogue between men and women—the voice is hers, the response is silence, the situation is static. In her previous work, of course, she has constantly described men who are defeated and withdrawn—in 'Conversation' on *Ladies of the Canyon*, 'The Last Time I Saw Richard' on *Blue*, and 'Woman Of Heart And Mind' on *For The Roses*. Her assumption is that men can't or won't change, so the search is on for a specially nice one—the romantic quest. The depth of her unquestionable sensitivity has no corresponding politics—her yearning to relate to men lies deeply below her threshold of consciousness. She chooses not to explore the politics of her unconscious desires, but only to display, with more and more proficiency, the possibilities of description. And in this album we have the culmination of that descriptive impulse, with a heavy reliance on dream imagery, and all the easy escape routes and rich incongruities that provides.

In technical terms, it is a refinement of her lyrical development since *Blue*. She's moved right away from verses, choruses and hook lines. And musically it is a development from *Court And Spark* with more arrangements, and therefore more musicians and more jazz-rock harmonies. In fact, there seems to be an almost random eclecticism in the musical styles she's chosen for this album, ranging from African-esque instrumentals to heavily orchestrated B-movie soundtracks. She must have wanted to emphasise the 'natural' imagery by ethnic-type backings, which indeed gives cultural and textural depth, but it's hard to see what she intended with 'Paprika Plains' which takes up the whole of side 2, and is reminiscent of some of Neil Young's worst excesses with the London Symphony Orchestra. This is only mildly interesting, in that it shows her piano playing—which has moved from the florid and wholly predictable style of the early albums to the more solid and integrated style of *Court And Spark*—in the context of a piano-concerto idiom. Meanwhile her voice now has an elegance of mood which seems finally to have replaced the fluting femininity of the early folksy singing. She allows her voice to wander round itself, taking risks, but more controlled.

We have to criticise this music within its own limits, and these are set not just by Joni Mitchell's consciousness and preoccupations, but also by the marketing of a successful woman singer-songwriter. But it is true that she is working and creating in a culture profoundly shaken by women's growing awareness of their position, and that the wider implications of these ideas do not seem to impinge upon her. She remains locked in the cultural milieu of the pretty men of the west coast, and the outlook is dreamy . . . but bleak.

Susan Hemmings
Bea Campbell
Lindsay Cooper

RISING FREE (EMI)
Tom Robinson Band

The recently released Tom Robinson Band EP has scored considerable play success—with 'Glad To Be Gay' doing well on Capital Radio's charts. Three of the tracks have clear political intent, only the first track 'Don't Take No For An Answer' is at all enigmatic. It could be just a generalised message of anarchy and it contains the sort of riffs that don't require much listening . . . and certainly don't demand any action. It must be meant as the hook to catch the ears for the three remaining numbers.

'Glad To Be Gay' sung with lugubrious irony catalogues verse by verse all the reasons why there is not a lot to be glad about, using catchy sing-a-long choruses which are, at the same time, gravelly shouts of pain. Then on the other side we have 'Martin', a celebration of male camaraderie engendered by resistance to authority. But why does Tom affect a working class accent for this song? It is a questionable technique because it doesn't ring true and our disbelief—our feeling of being taken for a ride—then hangs over into 'Right On Sisters', where he hits a sub-West Coast USA style. While Tom's courage and sincerity are not in doubt, we don't want somebody *acting* these songs . . . otherwise people might begin to think he can turn his talent to any old cause.

Despite some opposition from the business world, Tom has begun to use pop music to demonstrate the links between the oppression of blacks, gays and women. He is now recording a new LP which we'll do a piece on soon.

Susan Hemmings

IT BEGINS AGAIN (Mercury)
Dusty Springfield

Sooty-eyed, with bleached hair, and an effortless 'black' voice—that's how I remembered Dusty Springfield. And there were of course the rumours about her in lesbian circles, to which we clung with fervour, reserving her a place in our lesbian pantheon. That with her dusky voice she was in fact perpetuating the traditional male-lifting-female-from-darkness myth, we seemed to forgive her; how could we do otherwise, when most of us were still wading through very shady waters ourselves.



VAL WILMER

So when I heard she was launching her new record with a press conference—after four years silence—I went along, I must admit, mainly to test out the old shaky myths.

Well Dusty was less bleached, less sooty-eyed, less a lot of things . . . "I never used to do anything in moderation" she commented humorously on her old image. But there was something sadly conventional and inconspicuous about her now, as if she had been groomed for family entertainment. Funnily enough that's exactly why it seemed she left England: "I don't like feeling too comfortable; cannot take that quiet sliding and becoming part of the furniture . . . singing in Blackpool and Coventry . . . and no other outlets." The contradiction wasn't solved. And it became obvious very soon that lesbianism wouldn't be touched on either (I suppose it is easier for Tom Robinson), but she did say defiantly that there was no man in her life, adding philosophically that "you cannot fill a hole in yourself with somebody else . . . "

And the new record . . . *It Begins Again* . . . mainly love-songs about hearts breaking/blossoming, finding/losing love, the lot. Okay, there are two moving modern ballads; 'Sandra' about an isolated housewife who accidentally cuts her wrists, and 'Hollywood Movie Girls', queuing to be chosen for a screentest. But if it weren't for her voice switching pliably from compulsive soul movements through highflying jazzy complexities to soft soothing noises, not much would have seduced me to sit and listen to it. No doubt it'll go down well at parties.

Anny Brackx

reviews

books

AMERICA'S WORKING WOMEN:
A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY
compiled and edited by
Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon and Susan Reverby
(Vintage Books 6.95 dollars)

WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONS: AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE BRITISH TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
by Sheila Lewenhak
(Ernest Benn Ltd £7.50)

These two books, while both are engaged in the task of writing women's history, have very different perspectives. Starting from the premise that women workers "belong to the centre of history, not along its edges", the editors of *America's Working Women* state that "we offer this book as a political act. We want to help restore a history to working class women because we believe they can reconstruct this society." The book makes two significant steps towards this end—it provides historical documentation of women's experience and struggles from the emergence of capitalism in America to the present day; and it places this documentation within a "feminist perspective on history (which) makes possible a closer integration of economic and cultural, sociological and individual factors than ever before".

Bourgeois history is traditionally concerned with the 'public' sphere of people's lives and with dividing society and historical development into seemingly separate and relatively unconnected levels of events—thus economic history, social history, history of political institutions and so on. The fact that, when we consider the historical development of women's position, it is not possible to compartmentalise like this has meant that a different type of historical analysis grows out of women's history which has ramifications for all areas of historical study. The excerpts in this book give some idea of how a feminist historical perspective is an essential part of an understanding and analysis of the capitalist mode of production.

The subjects covered include—women's collective resistance to degrading working conditions in the 1820s and 1840s; the development of the division of labour in boot and shoe making which brought women into the trade; excerpts from diaries of women on the Oregon Trail; domestic service and slavery in the eighteenth century; the debate in the 1860s on women in nursing; the living and working conditions brought about by industrialisation; prostitution in the 1850's in New York; the origins of the sweatshop in the clothing trade; the clash between Susan B Anthony and the National Labour Union in 1869; laundry workers; strikes; child care; the experience of mothers in waged and non-waged work; women's war work; women on welfare; letters from black women hospital workers on strike in 1969; opposition from working women to the Equal Rights Amendment; and an account of the work of the Vice-President of the United Farm Workers who, when she began organising already had six children and went on to have four more.

The material demonstrates how women's part within class struggle can never be confined to making isolated demands but must incorporate the total position of women—must come out of the fact that many women are both workers and mothers and that their demands are as much for child care facilities, and the right to free contraception and abortion as for a rise in wages. As the editors of this book put it " 'Bread and roses' has been a woman's demand and it manifests a fuller understanding of total human needs than has usually been apparent among men's social movements—the need for creativity, respect, beauty and personal self-determination as well as a decent standard of living."

Sheila Lewenhak's book is very different. Her aim is to present "not a catalogue of details about each and every women's union or union of which they were members (but to) seek to show why trade unionism has been less developed among women than men". She doesn't actually do this, rather the book is a historical account of women in trade unions (in terms of which unions they were found in, the origins of their organisation and the legislative gains made by trade unions) and as such it provides a useful starting point for further research and future analysis. Whereas *America's Working Women* sets out its political analysis at the start Lewenhak writes a straight descriptive account of women in trade unions in Britain. Unfortunately, not only is there a lack of historical analysis but also the information which is given is sometimes very incomplete. Although some accounts are fascinating—especially those on particular individuals, for example, Julia Varley who in 1901 was on the executive of the Weavers' and Textile Workers' Union at the age of 13—the value of her research is called into question by an unquestioning presentation.

Towards the end, the book reads more and more like a trade union official history—for example, the recognition that the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers begrudgingly 'won' from Woolworth's and Foyles in the 1960s is described as a "great triumph", a judgement that shop workers today, especially those working in places like Marks and Spencers who still do not recognise union membership may view with scepticism. There is also very little attempt to question why the Equal Pay Act and the "Anti-Sex Discrimination Act" (sic) were passed and a total denial of the impact of what she calls "the most extreme wing of the new Women's Emancipation Movement, Women's Lib."

Still, the book is useful as a starting point and also for its bibliography, but it cannot be a substitute for the writing of women's history informed by a feminist perspective.

Jenny Morris

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THE NEW WOMEN'S HEALTH HANDBOOK
Edited by Nancy MacKeith
(Virago £1.95)

This book, an updated and slightly changed edition of the *Women's Health Handbook* (1976) is extremely easy to read and to understand unlike a lot of the 'official' Family Planning Association and Health Education Council literature dealing with the same subjects. It contains information on self-examination, contraception, abortion, menstruation, vaginal infections, and discusses some more general areas—drugs, smoking, nutrition, the NHS—all of which affect women's health. Where articles have been rewritten for the new edition, it has been for the good: in the article on "Women and Mental Health" for example, Kathy West adopts the positive approach of analysing the problems and offering advice and guidance instead of concentrating, as before, on the failures of medicine and psychiatry in relation to women.

One of the difficulties in writing about contraception is that almost any statement has to be modified in the light of new research findings. The mention the handbook makes of a new IUD containing progesterone "which may become available to British women" is a case in point: the IUD which is called Progestasert, until recently available to women in Britain, has been associated with the incidence of ectopic (tubal) pregnancies, and has now been withdrawn by the manufacturers (see *SR* 67). The handbook also claims that the efficiency of the IUD as a contraceptive may be reduced by taking antibiotics or aspirin—whilst there is some evidence that this is the case with respect to the Pill, there is no evidence that supports this statement about the IUD.

Finally, you may see that ▶

reviews

the FPA has expressed concern about the statement that to remove an IUD "someone just has to pull on the string and it will come out". Their insistence that only a *trained* doctor or nurse should remove an IUD is absurd. The women who wrote the *Women's Health Handbook*, women in self-help health groups and readers of the handbook would know as much, if not more, than these 'trained' personnel about their own bodies—anyone with knowledge of and familiarity with the structure of the female reproductive system can remove an IUD providing they are careful and gentle. Doctors have convinced us that the right to treat our bodies and control our fertility is theirs: this book is the product of an awareness that they are negligent and ignorant in their treatment of women; it is an important source of strength, and ammunition, in our struggle to regain that control.

Jocelyn Cornwell

COMING OUT Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present
by Jeffrey Weeks
(Quartet £3.95)

There is so little accessible writing on the history of homosexuality that it's easy enough to applaud any halfway serious publication on the subject. But Jeffrey Weeks's excellent book stands in little need of that kind of deprecating acknowledgement: it is a book which is persistently conscious of its own historical and political status, conscious (as the Preface notes) of the links between coming out as a personal experience of homosexuals today, and coming out as a historic process, as "the gradual emergence and articulation of a homosexual identity and public presence". It is this self-consciousness in the present that gives the book its power and potential scope.

I say potential, however, because a lot of the book's strength lies in this contextual framework and its implications, rather than in its own central substance, which is the history of homosexual reform movements in Britain. Weeks's framework is his assertion that the emergence of a definition of homosexuality in western society towards the end of the 19th century must be grasped as part of "the restructuring of family and sexual relations consequent upon the triumph of urbanisation and industrial capitalism". A central paradox of that process is of course the fact that it de-historicised its own components, so that concepts like 'family', 'child', 'mother', 'housewife' and so on were presented as natural qualities, given by a system of absolute relations (biological, evolutionary etc) which stood outside history. Weeks aims to explain how, on the contrary, sexuality is "a vehicle for expressing culturally determined roles", and how the concept of homosexuality, like other social labels, is "a product of history, a cultural artefact".

These ideas are proposed in the short introduction, but their presence in the rest of the book is less obvious, and to that extent it does not quite meet its own challenge. The bulk of the book examines the response of (male) homosexuals to their repressive social definition, looking at the work of groups of sex reformers and individual pioneers in Britain from the 1880s to the 1970s: men like J A Symonds, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, groups like the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, the Homosexual Law Reform Society, and in our own decade the Gay Liberation Front and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. This all forms a pretty narrow superstructure, socially and politically; and in that sense, it could be said that the actual contents of the book sit only on the surface of the capacious social vessel proposed initially. But Weeks himself acknowledges readily that his study *is* limited, and is only a beginning.

I feel more critical of the book's limitations when it comes to the question of the minimal place given to women and lesbianism in it. The few short chapters are rather anecdotal, and although the general approach of the book gives some confidence that Weeks hasn't simply ignored women, I think they suffer exclusion by the terms of his research project. If politics and the law are the central subjects, then obviously homosexual women won't figure largely, because their status wasn't defined in law. As in other parts of the book, it is open to the reader to apply Weeks's introductory interpretations, and his many scattered insights, to the situation of women: but they are not often made explicit.

Although my reservations about the book thus refer mainly to the limitations of its chosen historical angle, in fact it's also true that much of the detail it gives us is quite fascinating, for instance the background to the little-known attempt to criminalise homosexual acts between women in 1921. And equally important is the fact that it is written entirely from the standpoint of a committed insider: this isn't a salacious record of sexual curiosities, nor an aloofly academic study of an alien world, but an urgent, interior search, a restitution to us of one of the most damagingly concealed parts of our social identity.

Jane Caplan

AS SERIOUS AS YOUR LIFE
The Story of the New Jazz
by Valerie Wilmer
with photographs by the author
(Allison & Busby £6.50
and Quartet £2.95)

"Music's not a plaything," says pianist McCoy Tyner, "it's as serious as your life." Using chronicle, comment, anecdote and quote rather than analysis, Valerie Wilmer explores and explains that commitment in a way which, for once, doesn't exclude women.

In a world where the work is emotionally and physically draining and its unpredictability produces extreme competitiveness, the disjuncture between work and personal life becomes particularly acute. Both marital relationships (often the male musician who puts his wife/family first is rejected, as is the wife whose interests conspicuously conflict with the music) and the sexual 'perks' of musical performance are discussed, along with the traditional and changing attitudes to women's support. It's commonplace for male musicians to be dependent both economically and emotionally, on a woman's support, and the benefits are still largely taken for granted.

The chapter on women musicians is, as one would expect, slim. There are more women in jazz than there used to be (though not so many, I would have thought, to justify Val Wilmer's optimism) but "you play like a man" is still supposed to be a compliment, and the caring role is expected even when women are playing alongside the men.

Although the "Woman's Role" section of the book doesn't claim to be a full-scale study, it gives an excellent picture of the position of women in black culture which is particularly valuable in an area of writing which so often lacks a feminist perspective.

Lindsay Cooper

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Whoopee! Spare Rib Benefit Party ♀ Friday March 31st details on page 4

reviews

THE PASSIONATE SHEPHERDESS:
APHRA BEHN 1640-89
by Maureen Duffy
(Jonathan Cape £7.50)



"All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey."

So wrote Virginia Woolf in *A Room Of One's Own* in 1928, celebrating the importance of the first woman who made her living through writing. Maureen Duffy's tribute to Aphra Behn is far from flowery; to combat the myths of the literary harlot-cum-colourful spy she has written a deliberately factual, unemphatic biography of this 17th-century poet, playwright and novelist.

In contrast to the solitary great ladies of her age like Anne, Countess of Winchilsea who wrote without audience or criticism, Aphra Behn was a middle-class widow who travelled widely and engaged fully and freely in the literary hurly-burly of Restoration England. Her novel *Oroonoko*, now out of print and difficult to obtain, is remarkable as the first expression in English literature of sympathy with the oppression of black slaves.

Maureen Duffy's book is scrupulous, solidly researched and a welcome addition to feminist studies into women's writing. It is almost too specialist; the general reader may easily get lost, as I did, in the plethora of detail about political and court intrigue, the painstaking reconstruction, from scant sources, of her life and loves. I would have liked more critical appreciation of her literary output and a comparison of her love-poetry with that of contemporary male writers—since it was the concern with sexuality and love in her work which earned her her reputation: "a reproach to her womanhood and a disgrace even to the licentious age in which she lived".

Duffy's previous book of criticism *The Erotic World Of Faery* (which contains one of the most interesting Freudian/feminist analyses of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' I've ever read) was more speculative but also more stimulating in this respect.

But these reservations are minor compared with the enormous value of the project. With the feminist presses in England and America only just beginning to discover and reprint a whole range of women writers (Barrett Browning in the 19th century, Dorothy Richardson in the 20th—to name but two), her briskly-written, unpretentious and informative book will help reclaim Aphra Behn from centuries of neglect. **Jean Radford**

The Edwardian Woman

Duncan Crow

The Edwardian Woman, Duncan Crow's sequel to his *The Victorian Woman*, continues his entertaining account of how women lived in Britain and the United States and covers the period from the beginning of the twentieth century to the outbreak of the First World War.

Duncan Crow describes the lives of women in all classes of society: the entertainments they watched, the clothes they wore, their education and the effect it had on women's magazines, the work they did and the rise of the 'office' as the Mecca for working women. He also considers changing attitudes to contraception and to sexual morality.

This is a highly readable account of the society in which the Edwardian women lived and the social changes that affected their lives and to which they contributed.

224 pp 23 half-tone illustrations £5.95

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN

for children tv

WARRIOR QUEEN
ITV Monday 4.45pm

Warrior Queen is based on the true story about Queen Boudicca (Boadicea) of the Ancient British Iceni tribe who led her people in rebellion against the Romans. The story opens when the old king dies leaving his wife Boudicca and his two daughters to rule the tribe. Boudicca is played marvellously by Sian Phillips who looks a realistic age and gives her a strong but sensitive personality. In the first episode it looked as though Boudicca was going to be dominated by the powerful men of the tribe but at the beginning of episode two the Romans have just attacked the Iceni, burning their huts and flogging Boudicca and she takes a big step forward. She realises that trying to placate the Romans can only lead to further tyranny and that all the tribes must unite against them. The Roman Procurator, played by Nigel Hawthorne, is suitably cruel and decadent. But Boudicca's daughters, Tasca and Camora, seem unnecessarily silly, one stupidly aggressive and the other too timid to be able to help her sister when she is captured. However *Warrior Queen* is on the whole an exciting and interesting programme and seeing a woman who, by overcoming her oppression as a woman, can fight the oppression of her people makes a welcome change from the sugary sexism of many children's programmes.

Rosalind Kalpana Wilson



Boudicca leads her people in rebellion against the Romans.

reviews

books

THE STORY OF FERDINAND
by Munro Leaf (Puffin 45p)
MIKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL
by Virginia Lee Burton
(Puffin 60p)
THE HOUSE IN NORHAM GARDENS
by Penelope Lively
(Piccolo 50p)



Recently reprinted in paperback for the second time are two non-sexist golden oldie picture books for the very young. *The Story Of Ferdinand* first appeared in this country more than 40 years ago. Its single line of story in bold type opposite Leaf's humorous black and white illustrations make this classic tale of the Spanish bull who didn't like fighting ("He liked to sit quietly and smell the flowers") as fresh and as funny as ever.

Almost as old at 36, *Mike Mulligan And His Steam Shovel* is one of several books by the US illustrator Virginia Lee Burton who turned her knowledge of machinery and her graphic talents into superb children's books, each featuring a 'female' machine (Katy, the caterpillar tractor; Choo Choo, the little engine etc). Here it's steam shovel Mary Anne who can "dig as much in a day as a hundred men can dig in a week", and who manages to dig out a cellar in only one day. Burton's ability to describe technical processes in the course of an exciting story for the very young is incomparable. Let's hope her other picture books also come out in paperback.

For much older readers of 11 upwards, *The House In Norham Gardens* has an intelligent, quietly determined 14-year-old heroine Clare who lives with her great aunts (early Oxford graduates, still very intellectually lively) in a decaying house in Oxford. If you don't enjoy books that sensitively chronicle the decline of the gentry (they even have to take in a lodger called Maureen who wears courtelle mixture clothes), you might just be prepared to give this one a try for the intelligent, non-ageist great aunts.

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

theatre

SHE ASKED FOR IT
The Counteract Theatre Company

The theme song chanted by two women players attempts in one sentence a political understanding of the rapist: "It's because you've got nothing, no power or control of your own that you keep me down." Perhaps the players are blissfully unaware of the implications of such a statement about human, or at any rate masculine, nature. Do they assume that power and control produce gentleness? But perhaps in their eagerness, even desperation, to convince the audience of the horridness of rape they have deliberately chosen not to complicate anything.

The acting though is competent. Ray Meredith plays all the gruesome male parts energetically and convincingly, and when they do fleetingly allow a scene to escape the restrictions of the 'facts' about rape, they produce some very funny and effective dialogue.

The play consists of lots of short sketches, some of them tracing the effects of the raping of two women, one by a boyfriend and the other by a neighbour. We are shown their encounters with a policeman and judges, and their emotional dependence on a friend and a lover. These scenes are interspersed with sketches caricaturing attitudes towards rape and domination.

Two scenes courageously go beyond realism and make their points through cleverly controlled hyperbole. In one scene a woman literally has a man breathing down her neck, manipulating her. She is a ventriloquist's dummy, traditionally brighter than her owner and able to charm the audience through her cheek. But when she goes too far and threatens a tantrum over her role as a puppet, she is tranquillised and popped back into her box. In the other, two judges whispering conspiratorially and sniggering, quiz the raped woman ("the accused . . . oops, I mean the victim!") about her sex life, giving a knowing "aaaaah" when she admits she was giving her boyfriend a goodnight kiss. They collapse in orgasmic giggles when she concludes "then he raped me".



MARK RUSHER (IFL)

. . . Most rapes are committed by a man the victim knows . .

But mostly the players weren't confident enough of the characters they had created. In practically every scene a player steps out of her/his role and gives the 'true view'. In one embarrassingly crude scene a doctor (a baddie—you can tell by the deliberately bad acting), expressed the belief that a man must be psychologically sick in order to rape. Then, slipping off her white coat and stepping to the front of the stage, she reveals the truth: "If you believe that you'll believe anything . . . all men are potential rapists."

It is probably unfair to criticise this play strictly as drama as Counteract are performing it often as part of an education programme. During the discussion that followed the play at Southlands College, Wimbledon, one man said he wasn't a potential rapist, the thought had never crossed his mind. He was told from the stage that he must be because "rape is a man's fantasy and a woman's nightmare". The level of discussion was stunningly unanalytical with comments like "all men are sexist but women can't be sexist because they are oppressed" going unchallenged. And the players were content to answer serious questions such as "what can be done about it?" with evasions: "change the whole system". One or two men seemed keen to talk about their fantasies of rape but perhaps it is easier to admit to sadistic fantasies than to masochistic ones. Certainly no-one in that atmosphere could freely discuss fantasies of being overpowered. Despite Counteract's attempt to demonstrate that most rapes are committed by a man the victim knows, rape was still discussed in a vacuum as something outside most of our experience. There was no acknowledgement of the emotional and sexual dependence many women have on men and the subsequent abuse they often tolerate.

Penny Allen

Counteract Theatre Company can be contacted at 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 (01-251 4977)

In January three women and one man resigned from Counteract *after spending some three*

months researching and writing the rape play. They had worked with Counteract *for some time on different productions and they recently approached* Spare Rib *to explain their reasons for leaving the company. This is their statement.*

Counteract consisted of three groups working on different projects with a common administration. During the three months before we resigned the administration and the other two groups became dominated by the politics of the Socialist Workers' Party. As our work on the rape play progressed our differences with them became a major issue; we found ourselves to be a minority non-aligned socialist-feminist wing inside an SWP group. We were referred to as "just feminists" and our suggestions both politically and artistically were dismissed . . . Differences then began to be fought out on an artistic terrain and the rest of the company started to deny our abilities as writers and performers saying that we could have no political commitment so long as we remained unaligned to a party. This attitude was illustrated when we had leaflets printed for the rape show incorporating within the artwork the women's symbol. We felt this to be necessary but were told by the administration that we were not to use the symbol on any other artwork concerned with the play (it is subsequently not on the posters advertising Counteract's rape play). What followed was an acceleration of the attacks on us at all company meetings until we became very demoralised. In addition we were misled over the financial situation and we eventually felt forced to resign from the company.

We decided to go ahead on our own and apply for independent funding. But Counteract have produced another play about rape using our title and leaflets and have refused to give us the booking contacts we made while touring a play about nurseries.

What happened to us at Counteract simply reflects some of the wider issues which are generally important to the left. The SWP showed an unwillingness to take the women's movement seriously or to give political credibility to the socialist feminist grouping within the women's movement. If you would be interested in booking our play on rape then please contact us at: Scarlet Woman Theatre Group, c/o 7 St Mark's Rise, London E8 (01-249 7824)

TAKING OUR TIME

Red Ladder Theatre Company

Red Ladder Theatre's latest presentation is a historical play, set in Yorkshire in 1842, and researched and written primarily to be played to audiences around Yorkshire, where they are currently based. But this is not at all to suggest that it is provincial in its themes, or concerned only with dead history. While it retains many of the recognisable elements of their previous work (the red-ladder symbol of bourgeois hierarchies, the directness and clarity of good agit-prop work), the play is more conventionally ambitious in its structure, and the dialogue more sophisticated than before.

A family of woollen weavers are caught up in industrial and political events. John, the father, is a Chartist, still working at home on a handloom, and selling the cloth at market. His two daughters, Sarah and Jenny, both work in the mill and Sarah, the more independent of the two, is offered a better-paid job on the new power looms. Technological progress then, as often now, meant a double-edged situation: improved methods of production in the hands of the rising industrial capitalists (in the play, Ackroyd, a self-made man, himself the son of handloom weavers) meant increased unemployment and lower piecework rates for the people still manufacturing cloth in their homes.

Red Ladder shows the class confrontation as concerning the women as well as the men, as affecting family life as well as industrial relations. Their method is not that of introverted psychological drama, but one which sketches in character insofar as it is necessary to push the action and themes along. As the family is caught midway between the old system of manufacture and the fully capitalist system of modern industry, so working class culture itself undergoes change. In the play a folk-jester figure, Tom Tinker, is a simple continuity device. He introduces us to the trading fair, to clog dancing, comments on the Methodist minister preaching hellfire and immorality to the new industrial employees, is on the side of the people, and mediates between the performers and the audience.

The scenes are tautly written, the music economic and apt, acting as an extension of character, or creating a mood of grief when Sarah sings a song after Jenny is caught up in one of the factory looms and killed. The greater sophistication of this play is particularly evident at the beginning. An 1842 agit-prop play is put on by the Chartists themselves (a play-within-a-play), and they ask their audience (and indirectly us) to draw our own conclusions, make up our own minds. After the play the 'performers' briefly discuss whether they should have made their message clearer—the answer to them, as to Red Ladder, must be that there are times when an indirect approach makes the point more effectively than a head-on attack. What more contemporary parallel can there be than when Ackroyd appeals to his mill workers in 1842 to take a cut in wages and 'pull together' to help the country out of its current economic crisis?

Michelene Wandor

On Wednesday March 29, **Arena** *on BBC2 will do a programme on Red Ladder and the making of the play.*
Red Ladder Theatre Co can be contacted at 0532 792228



LAWRENCE SPARHAM (IFL)

A play within a play—1842 agit-prop.

THE ROSEMARY BUTCHER DANCE COMPANY

Dance in our culture is permeated with stereotypes of role and situation. Relationships are romantic, fabulous, based on hierarchies (prince and peasant), or fantasy (dancing swans). Narratives are rooted in notions of true love triumphant or tragically thwarted, ending in death or symbolic transformation. Women are always delineated in a reactionary way, objectified and glamourised.

The aesthetic of dance mostly depends upon traditional ideas of physical beauty demanding specific body types. Skills must even be based on training in early childhood so that bones are formed in certain ways; 'style' is dependent on this.

Rosemary Butcher and her small company of five dancers realise, in a form of movement/dance, a struggle to be freed of such bonds. Their controlled, economic and skilful explorations of the human body alone, in response to another and in collaboration in ever changing groupings, as demanded by Rosemary Butcher's choreography, asks much of the performer. No doubt many of the audience find the work challenging also, stripped as it is of the theatrical elements of narrative and of romance. They find instead intimations of other less glamorous human responses, trust, care, tenderness and concern in a purely kinaesthetic context.

The exploration of bodies and of space conducted by a group wearing everyday comfortable clothing is an experience with which we can all readily empathise. It tells us more about our own bodies and our own space.

The company's current programme, 'Passage North East', 'Anchor Relay', 'Empty Signals' and 'Theme' are all, except one, without music. This helps to intensify the concentration on the dance and serves to question dance's relationship and reliance on music. Even the accompanied 'Empty Signals' tends to use the music and the solo cellist as part of the choreography, elucidating the theme of stillness and staccato movement and the overpowering sense of loneliness and isolation of this piece.

The group is at present resident at Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, London, W6. They are doing monthly productions and running classes for professional dancers, for adolescents and for adults.

Maureen Hanscombe
Norma Pitfield

TOOTH & NAIL LOOKS AT THE MEDIA'S TREATMENT OF RAPE



"Y'know — one can't help but have a sneaking admiration for these multiple rapists!"

From Police, magazine of Police Federation, August 1977, sent in by Diana Teembach, London NW1



164. RAPIST MEDAL
From ad for Permaprints Ltd, PO Box 201, 96 Newington Green Road, London N1, in *Melody Maker* 17.9.77 sent in by Penny Remfry, North Shields

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From article by Prof M Cranston in *Times Higher Educ. Supp.* 13.1.78 sent in by Ann, London W11

The Mayor of Casterbridge (BBC-2), instinct said, was going to be one of those telly versions you could cheerfully lie back and be raped by.

From TV review in Guardian 30.1.78 sent in by Anne Greenwood, London NW10

Rapist took purse

THE 23-year-old woman who was raped at Bassingfield Lane, near West Bridgford, had her purse stolen by the attacker, police revealed today.

The purse and its contents are valued at £10.

Police investigating the incident are being led by Det. Supt. N. Wightman.

Dimly-lit

The attack took place just off the A52 road at Bassingfield at about 11 p.m.

The woman was not injured in the attack, after she had been pushed into a field beside the dimly-lit lane.

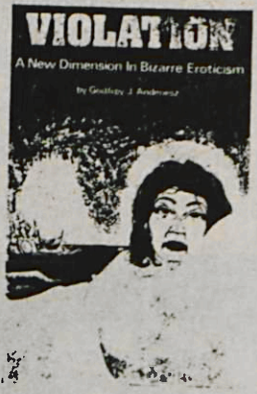
From Nottingham Evening Post 10.1.78 sent in by Marjorie Timms, Nottingham

It doesn't matter... and it can't happen....



seaside postcard

This is likely to become *THE* most controversial book of 1978!



GODFREY ANDERSZ, a former Detective-Inspector, spent three years' intensive research, interviewed over 100 rapists and their victims and in the Publishers' possession irrefutable evidence that the majority of the victims deliberately engineered sexual attacks against themselves. VIOLATION is a shocker which highlights a unique aspect of rape that is bound to cause a furore."

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and it's all the woman's fault anyway.

sent in by Ursula Huws, Leeds, Janet Law, London N5, Joyce Chester, London W10 and others . . .

BUT RAPE IS THE EXPRESSION OF THE PERPETUAL VIOLENCE DONE TO WOMEN BY PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

nine years together

A HISTORY OF A WOMEN'S LIBERATION GROUP

The London Women's Liberation Workshop—a network of small groups with an information service—was the first organisation of the British women's movement. The Workshop in its original form no longer exists. A Woman's Place has taken over as an information centre, at 42 Earlham Street, local centres have mushroomed, groups like Women's Aid and the National Abortion Campaign have developed along separate feminist lines.

But the small local women's groups which used to be the backbone of the Workshop are still alive: Belsize Lane was one of the first. They are still meeting after nine years.

At the peak of the Workshop there were 70 small local groups. When the Belsize Lane group began in 1969 there were only two or three other groups. We were very conscious that the Workshop's structure was completely different from the traditional left from which many of us had come. Our women's groups were deliberately small and federated to avoid the pitfalls of centralisation and hierarchy. We wanted to redefine the meaning of politics to include an analysis of our daily lives, so although we discussed feminism in other countries like Vietnam and Cuba, and read feminist literature from Europe and the States, we concentrated on who we were and what we could do now in our own country.

We wrote a statement called 'Our Point Of View' which became the basis for the Workshop Manifesto reprinted in each issue of *Shrew*. *Shrew* (begun in 1969 and briefly called *Bird* and *Harpie's Bizarre*!) was the Workshop's monthly magazine. Each issue was as different as the group which produced it—political discussion, poetry, personal exploration, psychology, Third World. *Shrew* was "6d for women and 9d for men until equal pay". In May, 1971, the Belsize Lane group produced an issue of *Shrew* on the family. It was the first time most of us had ever written or produced anything collectively. We began nervously and ended with a real sense of achievement.

Most of what we wrote in those days seems more angry and passionate than articles in feminist magazines today. Do women entering the movement now, when feminist ideas have become fairly common currency, experience the same sense of revelation and exhilaration that we did then?

Media

Certainly the ridicule and cruelty we received from the press helped our own solidarity. Our views and activities were misrepresented by all the papers—particularly in relation to: 1) leadership (they couldn't understand our non-hierarchical structure; 2) attitude to men (they thought we wanted to devour them for breakfast); 3) bra-burning (that one died hard). We insisted on being interviewed by women journalists only, but of course this was no guarantee that we would be taken seriously or that there would be no editorial intervention. For example, Jill Tweedie wrote a mocking article on the Tufnell Park group in 1969 and *The Sketch* did a two-page spread with plenty of pictures headed 'Inside the Sex Revolution Headquarters: Sketch exclusive on a plot to destroy the masculine ego'!

Mary Holland's article on the Oxford Conference was sarcastic and patronising: 'Hell Bent On Women's Liberation'. But a growing number of women journalists, these among them, though derisive at first, later joined the movement or at least became close sympathisers.

Oxford Conference

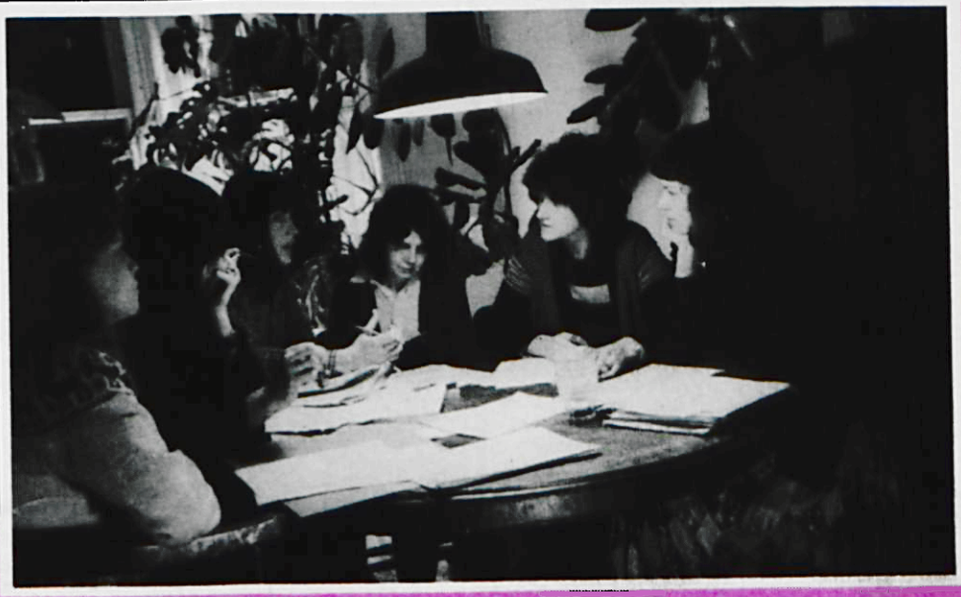
The movement was growing so fast that by the beginning of 1970 we felt confident enough to hold a national conference. Three hundred people were expected; six hundred arrived. Women, and some men, came from all over Britain, and a few from Europe to Ruskin College, Oxford.

The groups and individuals who came had never met as a body before and although there was often strong disagreement among us we all felt an exhilaration *knowing* that we were at the beginning of a new movement. There were proposals that we research into women's history; that we lobby for a Sex Discrimination Act; that we campaign for free contraception and abortion on demand; that we study alternatives to the nuclear family and child-rearing. Though many women at the Conference did not have children, questioning their assumed role of motherhood was a dominant theme. Several sympathetic men organised the first movement creche—now a commonplace, but then a total innovation. Ellen and Sue from Belsize Lane were in Liberation Films which organised a crew to film the conference. 'A Woman's Place' was finished a year later.

The March

In the autumn of 1970, Carole represented our group on the committee which organised the first national women's demonstration since the suffragettes. Thrashing out the four demands, even organising the practical jobs proved surprisingly difficult. The Ministry of Works didn't help either, refusing our request to use Trafalgar Square for fear we would do something obscene. Angrily we announced we would march there anyway, and permission was finally granted.

The weather on the day of the demonstration—March 6 1971—was unbelievably cold with sudden bursts of snow, but a massive crowd of women, men and ▶



JOSE NAVA

Sally, Mica, Audrey, Nan, Carole, Sue



1970 issue of Shrew, written by the Belsize Lane Group, on the family. Back row: Audrey, Mica, Carole, Ellen, Dinah. Front row: Imogen, Olivia, Sally F, Sally B.

children gathered at Speaker's Corner. Down Oxford Street we went with floats and badges, and placards listing the finally-agreed four demands: "Equal Pay Now; Equal Education and Job Opportunities; Free 24-hour Nurseries; Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand." All the way there were chants: "Out of the office; Out of the home; Out from under; Women unite!' The Women's Street Theatre Group, with grotesquely made-up faces, danced the whole way to the music of an Eddie Cantor song: "Keep young and beautiful; it's your duty to be beautiful; keep young and beautiful, if you want to be loved."

After presenting a petition at Downing Street, the march arrived at Trafalgar Square where there were speakers on the four demands, a play performed by the Street Theatre Group and a collection taken up which vastly exceeded our expectations.

In the weeks following the demo, the Workshop was suddenly enlarged by 50 new groups bringing the total to 66. The growth was so sudden and enormous the Workshop could hardly cope with it.

Actions

1969-71 After the march we got involved in a wide range of activities, sometimes as a group, and at others only a few members. We were invited, as most groups were, to speak all over London—to schools, colleges, trade unions, women's institutes—and we went in twos to show that, though we were in common agreement, no *one* person could represent the movement. A few of us were involved in the demonstrations against the Miss World Contest and the subsequent trial of some of the demonstrators. But many of us felt critical: the protest created misunderstandings and an image of the women's movement which took years to dispel. It allowed the media to ignore the other important women's issues such as abortion, equal pay, sexuality, the family.

1972 **Wimpy Bars.** "No unaccompanied woman will be served after 11.00 pm." We staged a late-night protest at the Finchley Road Wimpy. The staff were friendly; the manager absent. Later that year other groups organised a more comprehensive campaign and the ruling was changed.

1971 **Feminist Film Workshop.** Some of our group when in the original Tufnell Park Group had made a ten-minute silent film: *'Women, Are You Satisfied With Your Life?'* Using stills from magazines it showed the complicity of advertising in idealising woman as housewife. We all recognised the power of media images and the potential of film for radical organising. Many women, even in the movement, had never seen the films available on feminism, so we organised the workshop to show as many of these films as we could (in those days still most films were from the US) and teach anyone who wanted to learn how to project films for themselves.

We showed rushes from *A Woman's Place*, the documentary about the Oxford conference and 1971 women's march which two of our group were editing. And proceeds from the Film Workshop went to Sue towards making *One, Two, Three* about the Children's Community Centre.

1971 onwards **Children's Community Centre** Our groups campaigned for play centres for after school and in the holidays, to be run on more radical lines than the few centres that actually existed. There were several meetings with local parents, leaflettings and discussions but people lived quite far away from each other and the activities drifted.

Two of us from Belsize Lane began organising in greater earnest for better pre-school provision. With five other women, only one other in the movement, we chose a redevelopment area, Highgate New Town, near where one of us lived and got to know each house as it became, or was about to become empty.

After 18 months' hard work we finally opened a nursery, the Children's Community Centre. It has a man and a woman worker, is co-operatively run, is as non-sexist as possible and publicly funded . . . though money has always been a problem. The council has finally given permanent premises at The Children's Community Centre, 20 Lawford Road, London NW5. These kinds of activity meant that some of us were spending less time with our specific women's group and more time applying feminist politics in community action. All of us continually took the ideas and projects back to the group for discussion.

Audrey Battersby, age 42; Student Counsellor; also involved in Abortion/Contraception Campaign; kids: Ben, 15; Anna and Frank, 13.
Sally Belfrage, 41; Writer; kids: Eve, 11; Moby, 9.
Sue Crockford, 35; Youth Centre leader;

Woman, Are You Satisfied With Your Life?, A Woman's Place *and* One, Two, Three *can all be hired from Concord Films, Nacton, Ipswich or Liberation Films, 83 Belsize Lane, London NW3*



We wrote and performed *Cinderella Goes To The Moon* at the Roundhouse Saturday children's event, Moon Rock.

Sue filming "A Woman's Place"



SALLY FRASER

also involved in Children's Community Centre and One Two Three Films; Barnaby, 8.

Carole de Jong, 41; Potter; in Women's Art Group, Nightlceaners' Campaign; Max 9.

Nan Fromer, 37 Editor for educational film-strip company; was in Women in Media; Jenny, 12; Megan, 7.

Mica Nava, 38; Research Student at Institute of Education; previously in Women's Theatre Group, 1973-76; Zadoc, 13; Orson, 11; Jacob, 8.

Carolyn Roth, 31; nurse.

Dinah Brooke, 41; Writer; previously with Women's Street Theatre Group and Women's Psychology Group; Emily and Felix, 12.

Judith Brandt, 32; Psychotherapist; was in Women's Psychology Group.

Sally Fraser, 28; Acupuncturist, photographer; previously involved in Claimants Union and Women's Newspaper.

These last three are in India with Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

INTERNAL GROUP HISTORY

The present Belsize Lane group was formed in 1970, after the first Women's Conference at Oxford. But many of us had been going to meetings since 1969, at Tufnell Park, Belsize Lane or elsewhere. We had become involved for broadly similar reasons, but there were certain doubts that persisted in the early stages.

Nan: Like many experiences that have shaken me to the core, my initial involvement was largely accidental. Late in 1969, a woman I barely knew invited me to a woman's meeting in Tufnell Park. "They call themselves revolutionary socialists," she said. Without a second thought I accepted, secure in the knowledge that, whatever their aims, attending this meeting was bound to be an improvement over plopping my weary pregnant body in front of the telly in our freezing sitting room for yet another evening.

Fifteen minutes after our arrival, I was aware that I would not miss another of these weekly meetings if I could help it. If it did not provide me with instant sanity, it did provide assurance that I need no longer consider myself a candidate for the 'funny farm', since so many of the women arrayed in that small sitting room, despite their surface differences, seemed to share what for so long I had believed to be my own idiosyncratic suffering.

Sue: I resisted joining the Women's Movement for a few months. I was told it would divide the Left. And it took me some time to acknowledge that ordinary daily events could be political. How could the solidarity of 16 million Vietnamese struggling and winning against 200 million Americans compare with the underachievement of women?

But I'd been teaching, and I'd become very conscious of how girls seemed to lower their sights in early adolescence. I had a son I delighted in, but I couldn't reconcile myself to a life restricted to four walls. I found I could neither be comfortable in a purely private life nor easy in formal left-wing groups: I found them competitive and lacking in humour. It was really through discussion with Sheli Wortis, for whom I had a deep affection and respect and who was in the same Vietnam Solidarity group I was, that I overcame my fears that to meet as a group of women somehow wasn't serious enough.

Mica: At 18 I vowed never to marry. Before I was 24 I spent years in New York and in Mexico: I was independent and active. By the time I was 29 I had married and had three kids.

Before the first, I was aware and afraid of what motherhood might bring: I wrote in my journal that I wanted to avoid the trap of obsession with petty housewifely concerns. Yet I chose to have a child because I felt it would be as 'creative' as finishing the novel I had started—and easier. I was Earth-Mother: home births and breast-feeding and all that. I felt enriched by babies. But in patches I also felt unproductive, depressed and increasingly conservative.

After the second child I started teaching, and I felt justified in using my wage to pay someone to help look after the kids. During the political fever of '68 I wanted desperately to find a space in which I could be active and involved. My husband spent weeks at the Hornsey College of Art occupation; I felt strongly about Vietnam, about the May events in Paris; yet there seemed no way for me to be involved without feeling somehow fraudulent. Besides, I had to look after the kids, didn't I?

A few weeks after my third kid was born I went to my first women's meeting with the Tufnell Park group, in September 1969. Initially I resisted a good number of the new ideas presented there because they represented a direct attack on much of the way I'd been living—but all the same I went assiduously and was very excited.

The next year or so was probably the most explosive and passionate of my life. We had embarked on the long and difficult task of 'Changing The Way We Lived', which meant endless battles about the trivia of sharing daily domestic responsibilities, as well as the struggle with issues of sexuality, possessiveness, living in groups, property . . .

Audrey: I first became involved in the Women's Movement early in 1969 after two of the most difficult years in my life. My marriage broke up in 1967 leaving me with three small children, one of them brain-damaged by whooping cough vaccine, to bring up alone. The feelings of despair, failure, anxiety about the children (how could I cope?) were almost overwhelming.

Predictably, I leaned heavily on a few women friends and we spent many, often happy enough, hours looking after each other's children and belly-aching about men, clothes, menstruation, and wondering where it all went wrong. Why did marriages fail? Why didn't we feel fulfilled by motherhood? We tried to analyse the problems, even held meetings to discuss child-care and education, but we never made the links between ▶



SALLY FRASER

Carole de Jong and Val Charlton at Miss World Trial, 1970

politics and our individual feelings of disillusionment and discontent.

Then an old friend and I attended a short course run by Juliet Mitchell on 'The Role Of Women In Society' at the Anti-University, and we began to read people such as Betty Friedan, Hannah Gavron and Shulamith Firestone. Then the bells rang and the connections were made and there was that feeling of excitement, a dawning sense of militancy that I'd never experienced before despite involvement in various left-wing groups. I was no longer alone, but part of a movement which was primarily political but could be personal to me.

But I also suffered at first from reservations—a hangover from male-dominated left-wing groups? I was worried about separation, revisionism. What had Miss World demonstrations got to do with revolution? I didn't want to be seen as an angry, castrating 'Women's Libber'.

Slowly, however, reservations faded as the sense of group solidarity and support grew. The group has caused us all to change and see our lives in a different light: in bad times it gives us courage and optimism; we are critical and loving.

Discussions in the early meetings were deliberately and excitingly personal, but they were also quite structured and productive. We would take a topic and at the end of the meeting try to draw out general principles.

Nan: Among the many early discussions, the ones which most radically altered the course of my personal life were on the family. Disenchantment with the existing nuclear structure was not a new idea introduced to me through Women's Liberation, but our discussions brought it into much sharper focus. Perhaps the single most important idea that emerged for me was that the way you live your life is a political statement. In terms of the evils we had discovered in our dissection of the family, this came to mean for me a commitment to trying to find a viable alternative in communal living.

Mica: Another important area of discussion was child-care. In the winter of '69-'70 we had read and talked about a paper written by Sheli on maternal attachment, first delivered at the Oxford Conference. It was a critique of Bowlby's hypothesis (subsequently popularised by Dr Spock) which suggested that children separated from their mothers were likely to suffer permanent emotional damage. Sheli's paper also examined how these theories had been used as justification for keeping women at home (in their place!). She pointed out that there was evidence to indicate that what kids needed was a stable, stimulating and caring environment and that this could be provided just as well by the father as by the mother, or in fact by several people—"in certain societies multiple attachments were the norm".

In the political and intellectual environment of today it is hard to imagine the impact that this paper had on some of us with young kids. I had accepted without question (but over the years with increasing disquiet and resentment) the idea that the care of kids was mainly my responsibility, and like others of my generation I was wracked with guilt about the harm I could do my children through absence. So this paper was, for me at any rate, perhaps the single most significant and liberating experience of the early movement.

Sally: We began as fragments, guilt-ridden, inadequate as people (because mere women—no, not women, we were only *girls* then, whatever our ages); and by bringing our depression to each other like a gift, an offering of pain, we gradually drew each other out of our isolation. At any given time the change didn't seem so remarkable, though it was becoming apparent that life could be confronted, we could get up in the morning and bit by bit even enjoy what followed. And Monday nights became a treat, an addiction. There was always one beautiful and strong woman in every meeting. Sometimes she remained the same person for weeks; as often she shifted. She was her, or her, or them, or me. It taught me new ways to love myself, by loving all of us.

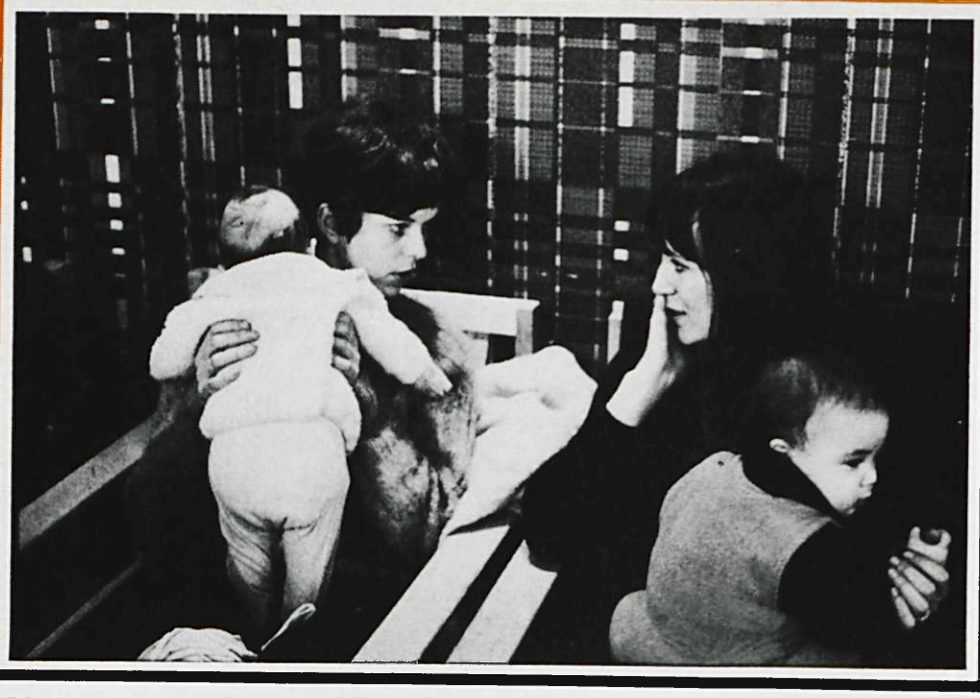
The group served as stretcher and crutches to those of us limping out of our relationships (the big ones, the children ones). At the start, all but two of us were in a similar predicament, mothers of small children with no one to turn to for help but their fathers, and then not even them as the bottles started falling off the wall. The first step was finding reliance and support in each other to combat isolation, finding the muscle to stand alone and bear the weight of self and of children, the courage to try new work, and finally to correct the warps and distortions in our relationships.

Sally: We have a peculiarly protective, even suspicious, set of feelings about each other's mates. We know the pain of these romances better than the bliss: no one has bothered to reproduce the emotions that got her into a marriage (though short-term affairs are happily discussed and in a way renew us all) but we've learned vicariously as well as on our own about the tears of living with male incomprehension, callousness, cruelty, possessiveness. Familiarity with what is by its nature a one-sided case about the man of one woman can make it hard to understand what she sees in him at all, and when a specimen has had the nerve to show us his face I'd often sooner punch it than embrace it. (This usually comes as a great surprise to him, whoever he is.)

To redress the imbalance we've gone to each other's parties, had picnics, even tried inviting them to meetings. And they've been human enough, even if you sometimes can't avoid that German-soldier feeling (kind to their mothers no doubt; can they help it if they just followed orders?). It's unfair: very. But they've been unfair to us: verier. Let a few of them feel what it's like, ignorant prejudice based on species, not character. They've all survived it, anyhow, even if they didn't learn anything much. (That wasn't the primary purpose of it, after all.)

Sue: The very strength of the group can affect a sometimes fragile relationship with a man. I sometimes feel conflicting loyalties. Mostly I feel completely open to discuss a particular man with the group. Sometimes I don't—either because I think he'll feel betrayed or because I know myself to be in a suggestible frame of mind and because the group knows me and not him, so I'll be the one to receive support and understanding and the situation will be unfair.

SALLY FRASER



Sue with Barnaby and Mica with Jacob, meeting for the first time at the Oxford Conference, 1971

Dinah announced that she was visiting an ashram in India.

She returned dressed in orange and wearing a picture of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh around her neck.

As she increasingly exemplified the 'surrender' that Bhagwan advocates, Dinah was loathe to meet us and our barbs. Eventually, however, she came to a meeting with Judith, whose own sympathies were coming round to Dinah's. The meeting became a passionate discussion of death.

Dinah had just witnessed a friend's terminal illness at the ashram, and participation in the Indian rites had been revelatory for her: she no longer feared death, she said, but was learning to see it as part of an inevitable cycle of birth and rebirth. She met with outraged argument: how, as a feminist only recently aware of the myths put upon us by men, could she accept a rationale which so obviously suited the Indian ruling classes? The quarrel seemed to evoke the bitterest passions and had obviously touched a deep anxiety in us all.

Since then, Judith and Sally Fraser have also gone orange; all three are at Poona at this writing, with their new names and preoccupations: a source of wonder to some of us, and anger to others.

But the threat of death . . . ? We'd always made brave noises about aging, but how ready were we for old age, let alone death? The idea arose (broached with the sort of phoney bravado that disguises the greater panics)—to stay together and to help each other to die as each wished, with informed support based on a thorough understanding of our needs and wants. We drew calm immediately from the idea. It has given us a renewed sense of continuity and value to each other; we've got a renewed sense of security in the knowledge that we're together, in greater or lesser numbers, to share the rest. And so, it appears, we have a future.

Carole: **The most profound effect of the movement has been on ourselves. We can look back over eight years to some external reforms in our society, but not nearly enough and not in the revolutionary way we at first envisaged. Sad too is the fact that most men, on a personal level, have been totally unaffected by the movement. We have left them behind. But as for the group, there are now such feelings of warmth and trust between us that I can hardly imagine my life without the presence of these women.**

Mica: **Whether or not this can still be called a 'political' group is an issue which remains unresolved and is an example of the type of disagreement that exists within the group. Although most of us have kids, are more or less of the same age and have known and loved each other well all these years, we are not more similar to each other now than we were. There are important differences of interpretation about the history of the group and there are political differences (some of these have been thrown up by the writing of this article, the first 'action' taken collectively by the group for many years). We see each other infrequently as individuals between meetings; on the whole we are *not* each other's everyday friends. Yet there exists a commitment to each other and to the life of the group itself which is powerful and which includes an understanding that it will continue.**

Nan: **To have the positive conviction that a communal environment might make possible less anxiety and more variety in human relationships is one thing; to live it out is quite another. For a time it appeared that we as a women's group, with our kids and our men, would embark on this experiment together. With the disappointing recognition that this was not going to happen began a long period of communal experimentation, for me, with other people (which still continues). It was an absorption which gradually began to cut me off from the others. Ironically, it was the group which had largely spawned my ideas about communal living; but now, when I came with my 'new' problems it seemed largely incapable of responding to them as it had to those individual problems we all more commonly shared.**

However, one definition of a *creative situation* is that it simultaneously provides individuals with enough freedom to be able to take a leap into the unknown, and enough security for them to want to take those risks. The group has fulfilled that function for me. We have all frequently referred to Sally B's idea that the group has served each one of us as a kind of collective super-ego: could we live up to the ideals of the group conscience from one week to the next? It is, of course, a question which can be asked the other way around too: can the group live up to each of our individual expectations? Happily, for those of us who have stayed with it and in it, the answer to both questions is *yes*. ●

The Belsize Lane group are writing a full account of their history which they hope to publish in future.



Sheli Wortis at Oxford conference

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For two years now we've been urging readers to subscribe to *Spare Rib*. But we need to build up sales through newsagents too.

Only if newsagents stock *Spare Rib* will we reach women who wouldn't normally see the magazine. And newsagent sales are essential for those who can't afford to subscribe.

So we're asking you to help make *Spare Rib* a presence in your newsagent (NB *Spare Rib* is no longer banned in the Republic of Ireland). In theory any newsagent could stock *Spare Rib*--in practice you'll find most don't stock it, have never heard of it, think it's a knitting or slimming magazine, say that it doesn't sell, they can't get it or even that it's closed down. *Don't be put off!*

1. Tell your newsagent, whether it is the corner shop or W H Smith (yes, Smiths *do* stock *Spare Rib*) in the High Street, that they can get it from *their own local wholesaler*. Ask them to place a regular order.

2. If they say they used to stock it but it didn't sell well, encourage them to try again. Insist that you and your friends will buy copies if it's available, making it worthwhile to stock it.

3. Go back later in the month and see if *Spare Rib* has appeared, or is expected. If the newsagent is having trouble with supplies, write or telephone to *our* distributor (who supplies the local wholesalers), Moore Harness Ltd, 31 Corsica Street, London N5 (01-359 4126). Ask for John Wilkins. Tell him the name and address of your newsagent and he will ensure supplies of the magazine. It helps Moore Harness if you can give them details of your newsagent's local wholesaler—name, address and story so far!

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